EXIT

HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

Williamson, Ga.

EXIT

By HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

THAT PRINTER OF UDELL'S
THE SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS
THE CALLING OF DAN MATTHEWS
THE WINNING OF BARBARA WORTH
THEIR YESTERDAYS
THE EYES OF THE WORLD
WHEN A MAN'S A MAN
THE RE-CREATION OF BRIAN KENT
THE UNCROWNED KING
HELEN OF THE OLD HOUSE
THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR
A SON OF HIS FATHER
GOD AND THE GROCERYMAN
LONG AGO TOLD: LEGENDS OF
THE PAPAGO INDIANS
EXIT

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By

HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

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To
the memory of
MY SON, PAUL

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I

THE PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players,
They have their exits and their entrances. . . .

AS YOU LIKE IT, ACT II, SCENE 7.

I

EVERY man and every woman, it is said, has one story. And no two stories are alike. The aspirations, loves, failures, triumphs, disillusionments, disappointments—all the elements which combined constitute human experience—form in different lives different patterns or plots until there are as many different stories as there are different individual human beings. And yet, all stories are alike in that they are composed of the same elements; the patterns are different, that is all. This is why we are so interested in our fellow human beings. Consciously or without realizing it, we sense our kinship with our neighbors because their lives are made of the same materials which we each have used in building our own individual lives.

This is Antonio Latour's story. But perhaps you will say it is Harriet Noël's story, or you may insist that it is Pierre Donovan's story. Indeed, it may even be said that this is the story of the play, "Exit," which Antonio Latour, in-

spired by his love for Harriet Noël, wrote for Pierre Donovan, her son.

Life and plays, Old Tony says, are made of the same stuff. And so, as you shall see, the old actor made his play, "Exit," for his beloved Pierre, out of the very materials of which Pierre's life was made. The things which went into the making of Pierre Donovan himself—including the life experiences of his mother and Antonio Latour—are all wrought into the pattern of the play.

If you should find here some of the things which have been wrought into the pattern of your own life, to that degree this will be your story. How you look upon it all depends.

The people of Orchard Hill, a small country town in Ohio, call him "Poor Old Tony" and laugh.

I have often wondered why they laugh.

Antonio, himself, when on rare occasions he notices my indignation, always says in his gentle way, "Never mind; in laughter fools betray their ignorance; wise men their understanding." And then, affecting an air of portentous gravity, he will add slyly: "There are times when I fear that

my good neighbors in this little village are somewhat limited. At least, they do not have that generous tolerance which characterizes those who have lived as you and I have lived in great cities."

Among those who know his history and have the understanding to appreciate his character, Antonio Latour is not a person to excite ridicule. His name once promised to endure with the names of Booth and Barrett and Irving and Mansfield and other actors of their day and rank. You who are old enough to remember the theater in the years from seventy-six to eighty-eight will recall the great artists with whom he was associated. He had only small parts, it is true, but the critics noticed him and spoke very kindly of his work—said it was full of promise and all that. Many times I have seen the newspaper clippings, yellow with age and worn by much handling, which the old actor treasures with such pride.

But Antonio Latour's career was ended when he was still a young man. He is an old man now, with silver-white hair, faded blue eyes, and thin trembling limbs; but his fine old actor's face is lighted with rare intelligence and feeling; he car-

ries himself with that proud erectness which distinguishes gentlemen of the stage and he never appears without a flower in the lapel of his ancient coat. "I confess," he will say in his gentle, dignified way, "that I have the weakness of always wishing to appear at my best. The boutonnière costs nothing and graces one's costume." His stage training, too, has given him an air so that all in all the old actor is not unaccustomed to having people turn to look after him when he walks our village street.

Antonio lives alone in the ancient, weather-beaten house in which his father before him was born. From the window where he sits in winter, or from the veranda in summer, he can see the many acres that once belonged to his ancestors. His family was rich, the villagers will tell you. And the same know-it-alls, with gusto, wonder how the old actor manages now to keep soul and body together. "Poor Old Tony," they will say, "he set out to be a famous actor and now he has nothing."

But Old Tony laughs and says, "I have enough. When one has nothing one has freedom from a host of pestiferous bores. When I cook my own meals the food is always to my taste. These good

neighbors who concern themselves so about my affairs do not know how rich I am."

One evening, with a chuckle of mirth, Antonio said: "I overheard that Buxton woman talking about me to-day. She was showing some visitors, two other women, the sights, and they stopped in front of my house. 'And this here,' she said (the old actor mimicked the Buxton woman's voice to perfection), 'is the old Latour home that I've been tellin' you about. Old Tony Latour he's lived here all alone ever since he come back from actin' on the stage in New York. He's a worthless, shiftless, lazy, good-fer-nothin'—a disgrace to his family and the community. Look, the house ain't had a brush of paint ner a tap of a hammer since his poor paw died. His paw and maw they was a real credit to the town and church. Elder Latour his paw was. She was a Deaconess. Ain't nobody ever heard tell what it was Tony done when he was an actor that made him quit and come home like he did but it must 'a' been somethin' awful 'cause he ain't never been no good to himself ner to anybody else since.' " With another chuckle, the old actor explained: "The good ladies did not know I was just behind the hedge, dig-

ging up the ground for violets." He paused, then added softly, "Harriet loved violets."

Because the pattern of his life experience is what it is, Old Tony thinks of his story as a play. Indeed, the old actor thinks of life itself in terms of the theater. Many times I have heard him declaim:

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players,
> They have their exits and their entrances. . . .

And always when he has finished reciting those immortal lines, he will say reverently, "I have often wished that Shakespeare had given us in this piece some thought of those actors, who, having made their exits, stand in the wings watching their fellow players on the stage."

"Circumstances," the old actor says, "shift the scenes; Fate is the stage manager; Nature the director; God the producer; we, the actors, enter, play our parts, and exit. The play goes on and on and on. And always, there are members of the company standing in the wings."

Our little village of Orchard Hill, with the First National Bank, the Owl Drug Store, Har-

riet's house, the home of the Careys, and the county jail, to Old Tony is a stage set. The Camden Road, the Deerfield Road, the Valley Road, are entrances. The back drop is a scene of rolling hills with farm houses and fields showing here and there amid woods of chestnut, hickory, oak, elm and maple. Tony's house is well down stage—close to the footlights, as it were—on the brow of the hill, at the edge of the village, overlooking the river, the valley and the wide sweep of country beyond. And sometimes, when the old actor is dreaming on the veranda in the summer afternoons, great banks of cumulus clouds rise, tier on tier, above the gently sloping land below, like the balconies and stalls of a mighty theater.

The Orchard Hill set has been changed a bit since Antonio Latour's first entrance over seventy years ago. The simple peace and quiet of the country village where Harriet and Tony played their parts is gone now. Modern improvements have come to Orchard Hill—Rotaries, Lions, Kiwanis, a Chamber of Commerce, an Advertising Club, Boosters, Go-Getters, Down-to-Daters. When I remark, with lamentations, on these changes the old actor, with that knowing twinkle

in his faded blue eyes, says, "Oh, well! the artists of the theater, you know, have always been forced to yield a little to the box office."

Many of the actors who were on the stage with Harriet and Tony in those opening scenes have made their final exits. Ann is no longer the light-hearted girl-wife she was when Pierre went away; her husband, Bruce, is middle aged; her father, Martin, is old. And when my ancient friend babbles with somewhat tiresome repetitions of what he has been and boasts of his association with the great artists of the stage whose names are familiar to every lover of the theater I think, "Well, what of it? A little longer and the old actor's cue to cease babbling anything will come." Nor will Old Tony be sorry to make his exit, for he believes as Pierre Donovan believes that Harriet Noël, Pierre's mother, is there off stage waiting to welcome him, and that together he and the woman he loved with such rare devotion will stand in the wings watching her son as he acts his part in this play which we call Life.

You know who Pierre Donovan is, of course. Perhaps you have seen him on the stage. There are those who say that his name will go down in

theatrical history as the greatest actor of his generation.

One of our Orchard Hill yokels once asked Antonio if Pierre was in motion pictures. You should have heard the dear old fellow roar! "Motion pictures! A thousand devils, no! The stage! The stage!" Then, with the dignity and graciousness of a royal personage, he said to the grinning listeners: "There are great actors in motion pictures, certainly; but my day was the day of the stage and I am sure that my fellow artists of the screen will forgive an old actor for saying, 'I thank God that I trod the boards before motion pictures were dreamed of.' Pierre Donovan was schooled by his mother and by me in the best traditions of the theater."

Orchard Hill says that Antonio Latour has wasted his life in idleness. The old actor, when aroused to the proper pitch, says of the villagers, "Clods, dolts! They do not know how great a thing it is to have helped to make an artist like Pierre Donovan. What can these people, in their narrow little commonplace cells, walled in by their stupid materialism—what can such poor cattle know of the world in which Harriet Noël and I lived—the world into which Pierre was born?

Fools! They think if they grow a good crop of potatoes or cabbages they have done something to brag about! Potatoes and cabbages—bah!"

Then, with the fire of his indignation fairly kindled, the dear old gentleman continues to spout flaming disapproval of certain present-day tendencies, tossing his silver mane, striding about on his thin old legs, his faded blue eyes flashing, his voice vibrant with holy wrath. "I tell you, sir, we are living in a potato and cabbage age. This generation is a huckster-minded generation. Self-styled artists hawk their wares and advertise themselves with raucous cries in the streets of the world like peddlers of vegetables. A great artist like Pierre Donovan is first of all a great soul. What do these earth-bound dolts know about souls? Great souls are not made to order from a cheap formula of art jargon and catch phrases of bally-hoo publicity. Damn their little pinch-beck lives! If this whole generation of materialistic clods could produce only one great artist soul it would justify itself for incumbering the earth. Potatoes and cabbages—bah!"

And then the old actor falters; the spouting flames subside; the fire becomes a steady enduring glow, and his voice softens reverently; "Harriet

was a great soul—the greatest soul that ever gave itself to the stage. God! What an actress she was! Pierre Donovan inherited his soul from his mother. Oh yes, people do inherit their souls. Roy Donovan, Pierre's father, had no soul with which to endow his son. I knew that long before Donovan met Harriet, but what could I do?"

Antonio's forefathers were French, and Harriet's ancestors were of the same race. Indeed, Harriet's father, "Doc" Noël, often boasted that he descended from the Huguenots. "Doc" was a druggist and the family or, at least, "Doc" and his wife, were highly respected in Orchard Hill. Mrs. Noël died when Harriet was born and the child was raised by a housekeeper—an ugly old witch of a woman, feared by every youngster in the village. Forced to live too much within herself, the little girl soon learned that she could trick the housekeeper or her father into granting her almost anything and so grew up doing much as she pleased.

She was never a pretty child, as so many little girls are pretty—her arms and legs were too long and thin and always flying about as if they were only loosely tied to the rest of her. Her face

was freckled, her nose strongly inclined to turn up; she had large gray-green eyes, a wide mouth, a broad forehead, and a general air of elfishness that provoked the villagers to wonder "what the child would come to."

In the years of their childhood, Tony and his little girl neighbor were often together but she was no more to him than his other boy and girl playmates. He did not become conscious of her until the year before they graduated from the public school. Tony was fourteen; Harriet was two years younger. She had been a grade behind him but that year she caught up with his class so that they would graduate together.

One evening when we were sitting with our pipes in the summer twilight the old gentleman said, "It is strange how that part of my life which I gave to the theater—I mean the years when I was an actor—seem to me, now, to be only a dream." And then, after a long silence, he continued as though he had forgotten my presence: "But my childhood and youth which I spent here in Orchard Hill with Harriet—those years of my life are very real."

The Latour house, as I have said, is on the brow of Orchard Hill, where the higher and com-

paratively level bench land upon which the village stands drops steeply down to the valley and the river. From Tony's home, the line of this declivity which marks the limits of the village on the river side, curves sharply to the east, and a half mile or so away, also overlooking the valley pastures and meadows, stands the old house where Harriet lived.

About midway between the two homes there is a little cuplike depression in the general contour of the hill—one of those pretty half-hidden retreats which are often seen, by those inclined to notice such things, in country where hills and valleys meet. A long time before Tony and Harriet were born, Cherry Creek followed the foot of the hill and emptied into Clear River some two miles below where it now joins the larger stream. But with the passing years this ancient channel of the creek became no more than a slight depression in the level of the bottom land, and the willows, in this narrow strip of low, moist ground, grew a wall of fragrant green to shut in the little hillside nook from the open valley between the hill and the river. In Tony's boyhood this valley land was a pasture—as it is to-day. Cattle have always loved the cool shade of the

willows and have kept the grass of the tiny plot of ground behind the screen of trees cropped short. On the steep banks, which on three sides rise from the green-carpeted floor, violets, May apples, brown-eyed Susans, buttercups, golden rod and wild roses grew, as they grow to-day, in sweet profusion. Always there is the pleasant smell of grass and flowers and trees and cattle and warm moist earth. It was there that the boy first became conscious of the girl—I mean conscious of her as every boy, when his time comes, is aware that the girl he has known merely as a neighborhood playfellow or schoolmate is something more.

The boy was fishing that Saturday afternoon, in the river above Camden Road bridge, in the big hole at the mouth of Cherry Creek. It was one of those days in late spring when the last trace of winter has vanished and the drying heat of summer has not yet come—the time of the year when everything is young and fairly bursting with the sap of life. The silvery light on the surface of the gentle stream which slipped so quietly between the green banks—an occasional ripple made by fish or frog or dipping swallow—the splash of a muskrat—the rattle of a kingfisher—the whistle of red-shouldered blackbirds—the song of meadow

larks—the distant tattoo of a flicker—it all comes back to the old actor now as he dreams of those years when he and Harriet were boy and girl together.

When the shadows lengthened toward supper-time the boy set out across the pasture for his home—bare feet and legs browned by the sun—rolled-up overalls, faded and patched and held in place by one suspender—calico shirt torn and without buttons—straw hat with only half a brim—a string of fish in his hand—his fishing pole, a slender birch sapling, over his shoulder. The cows with heavy udders swinging, were moving with careful dignity toward the barnyard gate. Across the pasture, on the brow of the hill, he could see his home and the house where Harriet lived with her father and the old witch of a housekeeper.

The boy could not have told why his mind turned to his girl neighbor and schoolmate, but he was thinking of her when he reached the willows which shut in that little retreat at the foot of the hill. Then, suddenly, through the screen of fragrant leaves and brown tree trunks and branches, he saw her. She was gathering the long stemmed violets that grew in the tall grass on

the steep banks. His bare feet on the moist earth under the willows had made no sound so that she was unconscious of his presence. The boy stood very still, grinning with impish amusement that she should be so unaware of his nearness. That is, he *thought* she did not know he was there—one can never tell about a woman. Presently he would announce himself with a wild Indian yell or a panther-like scream, and would laugh and jeer at her startled cry of fear.

Then, as he watched her so absorbed in her pretty occupation, so unaware that any one was invading her privacy in that little retreat, something happened to the boy. A feeling he had never known before came over him—a new consciousness—an awakening. For what seemed to him a long time he stood there under the willows watching the girl and wondering at this new and strange emotion. When, at last, he mustered courage to announce himself, he had completely forgotten his purpose to rush upon her with a frightful yell. Making a preliminary noise in the thicket, he advanced slowly and with an elaborate effort to appear casual said, "Hello."

She smiled, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes told him she was glad he had come.

"Hello."

And there they stood; the girl pretending an absorbing interest in the violets she held; the boy, for the first time in his life, painfully aware of his wretched clothes, his unkempt hair, and dirt-stained hands and legs and face. He could not have spoken a word had he been threatened with death or promised everlasting glory.

At last she broke the embarrassing silence. "Been fishin'?"

"Uh huh." He held up his string of fish for her approval.

The girl's voice thrilled with admiration and wonder. "Oh, did you catch all those? What beauties! How do you ever do it?"

A warm glow spread all over and through the boy; inside and out he tingled with rapture. "Aw shucks, this string ain't so much—you just ought to see what I catch sometimes! It's easy if you know the right place and have the right kind of hooks an' line an' sinker an' bait an' know how."

The paths which led from the two homes on the brow of the hill to this secluded nook behind the willows in the pasture were deeply worn during the years which followed. Often Harriet would

go to meet her schoolmate there or Tony would go to find her waiting. And often does Old Tony go there now, to sit alone with his memories of her. Vividly and real, with the smell of the warm moist earth, the willows, the grass and the flowers, the years come back.

They who pride themselves upon being too sophisticated and worldly-wise to indulge in sentiment—who laud cold intellect, and ridicule the warm emotions of the heart—they will laugh with hard laughter at this old man's memories. They will say that Antonio Latour's story is sentimental bosh, and they will not hesitate to cry it down before the world.

Well, in writing this old actor's story, I make no claim to literary equality with these sophisticated gentry. But of this I am convinced: All normal men and women who have truly lived do have such emotional memories. And I believe, too, that if the truth were known, the heart experiences which these world-hardened and burnt-out critics so carefully hide are the dearest treasures of their years. No, I have no illusions—I know that I am not so skilled in the art of writing as these proud, unemotional dealers in words. I am only more honest.

As for what are termed the realities of life—do not fear. Before Antonio Latour's story is finished you shall hear enough of betrayals, and robberies, and murders, and tragic death.

Late that night when his parents were sound asleep, the boy stole out of his bedroom window and followed the path at the foot of the hill to the house where the girl lived. For an hour or more he stood in the soft darkness, under the stars, watching the square of light which was the window of her room. Old Tony laughs now when he says: "I did not know until long afterward that it was the window of the old witch of a housekeeper's room, and that Harriet's room was on the other side of the house."

Picnics under the great trees in the valley beside Cherry Creek, or in the deep woods among the hills—wild flowers in the spring—berries in the summer—nuts in the fall—boating on the river—skating, sometimes at night with huge fires, above the mill—sleigh rides or coasting on the hill near Harriet's house in the moonlight—school—church—sociables—parties—all the life of their native village and countryside the boy and the girl lived together with their village

mates. Every day, at the Post Office, at one of the village stores, on the street, or at school, they saw each other. And always their young hearts were warmed by the enduring glow of that first awakening. They did not speak of it—boys and girls do not usually speak of such experiences—but they knew. They made no attempt to put what they felt into words, simply because no words were needed.

It was during their last year in public school that they were chosen to act the leading parts in an amateur play and so made their first appearance together on the stage. They met often in that little retreat at the foot of the hill between their two homes to rehearse their parts, and it was then that they named the place their theater. And no other member of the company was ever invited to meet with them there. They wanted no other audience than the kindly cows that lay in the shade of the willows, contentedly chewing their cuds and viewing the performance of the youthful actors with mild-eyed wonder.

Harriet's acting in that play was the talk of the village. Old Tony, when he relives that occasion, says: "It is strange but I never realized until I saw her on the stage that evening how

beautiful she was. She seemed to be lighted with an inner fire and her bewildering personality together with her acting held her audience breathless."

But many of the good villagers who saw Harriet Noël that evening shook their heads in grave concern. To their simple country minds, you understand, it might be all right for a boy or girl to act in a school play, or appear in a church cantata, or be seen in a tableau, but professional men and women of the stage were, beyond question, a bad lot. In the eyes of Orchard Hill, an actor ranked but little higher than a bartender, while an actress was an unprincipled hussy—an impossible creature—simply impossible. Therefore, too much natural ability in dramatic art was a doubtful gift. To exhibit marked talent for acting and a real love for the stage was to reveal a tendency toward evil-mindedness which, by all right-thinking people, was to be deplored.

Old Tony says, "I have often laughed to remember how shocked I was when Harriet first confided to me her ambition to become an actress. At that age, I had never questioned Orchard Hill's judgment of moral issues. My parents, staunch pillars in the Methodist church, destined

me for the ministry. That Harriet, of all the girls I knew, should deliberately propose to walk so far from the established paths of righteousness was a severe blow. Not to my love—oh no! The blow fell upon those Orchard Hill standards of righteousness."

The two young people entered Orchard Hill Academy in the same class and during the four years of their Academy life were leaders in all the activities of the Dramatic Club of the school. In most of the plays presented they were cast for the leading rôles. And always, whenever it was possible, they met in their theater to study and rehearse their parts.

More and more, Harriet dreamed of a career on the stage. She fed her soul with biographies of great actresses. She devoured every book about the theater or the drama that she could find in the village and the Academy libraries. She read plays innumerable. And all the while, as she grew into womanhood and developed her native gifts, her personality grew more distinctive and beautiful. Indeed, as she gave herself with increasing fervor to her chosen art, she seemed at times to belong more to some invisible world of spirits than to this common, material, work-a-day

existence. Even in her gayest moments, one felt that she communed with people who were not of the flesh, as if her world were inhabited too largely by characters which were born of the imagination. In quiet moments she often seemed to be looking far away—seeing things invisible to Tony's eyes—hearing voices which he could not hear.

You can imagine how Orchard Hill looked upon the development of this girl who lived so apart, who was so different, who, in short, did not belong. Raised as she was by her father, whose every waking hour was devoted to his drug store, and by that old witch of a housekeeper, it was not strange that she should grow up strongly individualized, and that she should sometimes make a bit free with our country village conventions. Considering her unusual freedom of speech and manner together with her love for the stage and her gift for acting, and with Orchard Hill's settled conviction that professional actors were a bad lot, and actresses worse, it is no wonder that the village was in a chronic state of being scandalized. She was talked about as a wild girl. There were predictions that she would come to no good end. For her father's sake she was not

exactly ostracized, but for any boy or girl to be too intimate with her was to be placed under surveillance by the watchful guardians of the community's morals.

Of all the villagers, young Antonio's parents, naturally, were most disturbed. Elder Latour and his Deaconess wife were not blind to their only son's interest in this girl whose name was so frequently on the tongues of the neighborhood gossips. In their eyes, even though by any chance Harriet Noël escaped the moral ruin of a stage career, she still could scarcely be looked upon as the ideal wife for a Methodist clergyman. I suspect, too, that even in Tony's mind there were doubts about a stage career for Harriet. But about his love for Harriet there was no doubt. Nor was there any doubt in his mind as to what her answer would be when the time came for him to ask her to be his wife.

Toward the end of their last year at the Academy, Antonio began to think seriously of the future. He had not fully committed himself to the ministry but it was tacitly accepted by his parents and the community that he was to enter a Theological Seminary following his graduation from the Academy. The young man realized that

the time for definite decisions and plans was at hand.

Then it was spring and the Dramatic Club was giving its last play of the season. Harriet and Tony were rehearsing their parts in their theater —that little retreat carpeted with thick, short pasture grass and walled in by the flowery banks and the willow thicket. The memories of their first boy and girl meeting and of the many hours they had spent there together—the season, warm and sunny and rich with the fragrance of the earth and growing things—the birds serenading them with their mating songs—butterflies dancing their love dances—golden bees happily occupied with their sweet tasks—do you wonder that the young man was stupid about the play which he and the girl were rehearsing, and that she had often to chide him for not getting into his part? Tony's thoughts were all upon the rôles that Harriet and he were to act in a play of much greater importance. He wanted to make the love passages real. But the girl was too intent upon the drama which they were rehearsing and he dared not risk speaking of his very real love when she was so occupied with the art of making their stage love seem real. So the boy took what comfort

he could in their mimic love scenes, which they would play on the Dramatic Club stage before all Orchard Hill, and waited a more opportune time.

That play was a great success. I think that Harriet, in her love scenes with Tony, must have felt the genuineness of his passion. Certainly she was aroused to an intensity of feeling in her part which electrified the audience. She was like a creature inspired. Even those who were most emphatic and outspoken in their disapproval of the professional stage and of Harriet—even they forgot themselves and, yielding to the spell of her genius and the charm of her personality, crowded about her, when the final curtain was down, with congratulations and words of praise. The girl was beside herself with the glory of her power and in the excitement of her triumph threw her arms about Tony's neck and kissed him before everybody. It was an unheard-of thing for an Orchard Hill girl to do—and Orchard Hill did not forget it.

Tony felt so confident of her love that he almost spoke that night when he took her home. But something warned him that this was not the time so he asked her to meet him at their theater the next day, in the afternoon.

When the appointed hour arrived, Antonio was there, half hidden among the willows. He wanted to see her as he saw her that day when barefooted, with tattered mud-stained clothes, fish pole and string of fish in hand, he first thrilled to the charm of her girlhood.

Presently she came along the well worn path from her home on the brow of the hill. Tony held his breath and, behind the screen of willow leaves and branches, stood very still. While waiting for her lover, not realizing that he was so near, Harriet gathered violets, exactly as on that other occasion which now seemed to Tony but an hour ago.

At last, making a slight noise in the thicket to warn her, the young man stepped forth. The girl stood, her hands filled with violets, smiling, as if she had known all the time how near he was, and had been pretending, just to please him.

"Hello," said Tony, foolishly.

"Hello," answered Harriet; and then to his delight she added, with the adorable shyness of a little girl, "been fishin'?" She had remembered too!

We must not dwell upon the old actor's memories of that hour when he asked Harriet to be his

wife. She was sitting on a large stone which was part of what they called furniture in their theater. The boy sat on the grass at her feet. Many times in rehearsing scenes for different plays they had sat thus and Old Tony says he had a strange feeling that on this occasion, too, they were only acting in a play.

While they talked of this and that, Harriet busied herself with the flowers she had gathered; but when, at last, Antonio managed to speak what was in his heart, her hands became very still. For what seemed to the young man a long time, the girl made no reply but only sat there motionless, with that look in her eyes as if she were seeing things invisible to him and listening to voices which he could not hear. And, in that silent moment, the boy's heart sank for he knew what her answer would be.

At last she smiled a strange little smile and said gently, "I have known for a long time, Tony, that you would some day say these things to me." She paused and when she went on her voice was not quite steady. "And you have known, I am sure, that I expected you to ask me to marry you. I should have been terribly disappointed and hurt if you had not—because—because—you see, I do

love you and I wanted the certainty of our love. I wanted this moment, Tony dear, because it is all we can ever have."

To all his pleadings she answered that she had given herself to the art of the stage and that she had made her decision recognizing their love and realizing all that the sacrifice would mean. She felt that she was born to the life of the theater. To her, the art of acting was a sacred thing. Antonio had been set apart by his parents to the church. Marriage for them could result only in unhappinesss. In spite of their love they must go their separate ways.

In desperation Tony declared he would not give her up. He argued that he had not finally committed himself to the church and that his parents had no right to say what his life work should be. He said that he would go with her; that they would together devote their lives to the theater.

But Harriet answered: "I have thought all that out, Tony; it simply cannot be. Inevitably we would both feel that I had come between you and your parents. In time you might even come to think that I had lured you away from the church. The realization that we had accepted love at such a cost would make happiness impos-

sible. If I were to deny my own nature and give up my art we would come, in the end, to the same regrets, discontent and unhappiness. It is better for us both, Tony dear, to keep our love as it is—beautiful and unspoiled."

When he could not prevail against her decision he took her home along the little hillside path. For a long time he stood in the twilight, watching the door through which she had entered the house, hoping against hope that she would feel him waiting there and would come back. But the door remained closed.

That play, which the Dramatic Club had presented only the night before, was given for the benefit of the Academy Library Fund. Tony was treasurer of the Club. The good villagers of Orchard Hill were wild with wrathful excitement the next day when it was discovered that Antonio Latour and the money which the Dramatic Club had earned for the school library had disappeared.

Old Tony still insists he did not mean to steal that money. He explains that he was so beside himself that night that he was not responsible. He could think of nothing but that Harriet, con-

fessing her love for him, had refused him because she felt herself destined for the stage while he was doomed to the pulpit. He feared if he remained to graduate from the Academy he would be committed past hope to the ministry as his parents had planned. The money in his possession gave him his opportunity to escape and he seized it blindly, madly, without fully realizing the enormity of the crime.

A week later, in Buffalo, Antonio joined a small summer stock company as general utility man, and wrote his parents that he had decided to go on the stage. He did not mention Harriet in his letter nor in any way hint that she might have been the cause of his sudden departure from Orchard Hill. He said only that he had come to realize how much his happiness depended upon his being an actor; and that he had left home because he feared if he remained in Orchard Hill he would not be permitted to follow his own choice of a career.

The old actor recalls this period of his life with an odd blending of sadness and humor. He says: "I think my parents could have endured the disappointment of having me refuse to enter the

ministry. I think they could have forgiven me for absconding with the Dramatic Club funds. But my choice of the stage in preference to the pulpit was a blow from which they never recovered. That the name of Latour should be so dishonored —that their son should deliberately choose to live the life of an actor—that they, against their will, should be connected, even in this way, with the stage was a disgrace too shameful to be endured. They never again held up their heads in Orchard Hill. Father wrote me that he had returned the money I had stolen and that for my parents' sake the good people of Orchard Hill would let the matter drop so that I need not fear punishment from the law for my crime. God, he promised, would punish me enough. I wonder, sometimes, if father and his good brethren in the church are satisfied with what God has done to me. Father advised me, too, that it would not be wise for me ever to return to the village where I was born and that no matter what my success in the disgraceful profession I had chosen might be, I could never hope to live down the wicked thing I had done."

Of Antonio Latour's wanderings during the next three or four years and of his struggles to

win any sort of place on the stage it is necessary to write only a little. Haunting the booking offices—working at every sort of job known to the theater—occasionally playing small parts, mostly in failures with now and then a little success—slowly and painfully adding experience to experience—it was only the usual training for those who aspire to a place among the accredited artists of the stage. During all this time he did not write a line to Harriet; he did not mention her name in his letters to his parents, nor did they ever write a word about her. But Old Tony knows, from what he learned later of the way Harriet was treated after his disappearance, that the villagers guessed she had had something to do with his decision to be an actor and his sudden departure from Orchard Hill.

It was during those first years of his stage career that Antonio became acquainted with Roy Donovan, who was connected in some business capacity with one of the companies with which Antonio worked. No one seemed to know much of the fellow's history beyond the facts that he had spent much of his life in the far west and had roamed widely over the world, and it was generally held that the less that was known the

better it would be for Donovan. About the time Antonio first met him, Donovan married an actress—a Mrs. Carey, a widow with one child, a boy named Bruce. Her stage name was Aline Easterley. She and her son were working under Donovan's management when the mother was killed in a train wreck. Donovan kept the boy as his own son. How much of his interest in Bruce was due to his love for the boy's mother, a real affection for the lad, or his belief that his stepson under his management would some day bring him a substantial financial return for his trouble, is a question. That Roy Donovan's interest in the theater was wholly commercial, no one who knew him ever questioned.

At last, by a stroke of good luck, Antonio was engaged for a small part in a New York production. It was in Augustin Daly's company, playing in Daly's Theater near Thirtieth Street and Broadway.

The young actor felt that at last his feet were actually on the lower rung of the ladder. To see his name, Antonio Latour, in a cast with such distinguished artists! We can imagine with what pride he mailed a program home to his parents. When he actually received a letter from them,

with a few cautiously chosen words of congratulation, his heart was full. Without doubt all Orchard Hill would hear of his success. And Harriet! Harriet would know. Perhaps they might even show her the program; but no—that would be too much!

Antonio was standing near the entrance to the theater one evening watching the crowd. He did not go on until the second act and enjoyed seeing the line-up at the box office—as every actor will understand. Suddenly, in that multitude of strange faces, he saw her.

In that first breathless instant poor Tony's heart stood still; then it pounded wildly and a mad jumble of thoughts filled his brain—home—the village where he and Harriet were born—that hillside nook behind the willows in the pasture—that kiss before the whole company, at the end of the play—that last meeting in their theater—the closed door—his flight in the night—the money for the school library fund. What had happened to Harriet after he disappeared? Why was she here in New York? Did she know that he, Antonio Latour, was now an actor with this company? She was buying a ticket! She would see

him on the stage! Then he was by her side asking foolishly if she remembered him.

There was only time for Tony to learn that she was living in New York—a student in a school of acting—and to receive her promise to meet him after the performance that evening. They went to her apartment, a tiny little place within walking distance of her school. She got together a little supper and they talked.

Soon after Harriet graduated from the Orchard Hill Academy, the old witch of a housekeeper had become hopelessly insane and was placed in an asylum, and the girl was forced to abandon her plan to study for the stage and to remain in Orchard Hill and make a home for her father. Then, "Doc" Noël died suddenly of pneumonia. The druggist had been fairly successful in business and had provided for his daughter, in addition to the drug store and the home, a small income. There was nothing now to prevent the girl from realizing her dream. She sold the drug store and came to New York to study the art of the theater. This was her last year in the dramatic school. She planned to go into a summer stock company, somewhere, after her graduation in the spring.

Many times that evening Antonio was on the verge of pleading his love. We can imagine how he longed to tell her why, in the eyes of Orchard Hill, he had disgraced himself; why he had caused his parents such heartache; why he had worked so hard to win a place on the stage. But he could not—he dared not speak of love. Old Tony says, "Her spirit held me off. If you had known Harriet Noël as I knew her," he always adds, "you would understand what I mean."

The old actor's analysis of Harriet Noël's character is probably the best: "When I speak of Harriet Noël's spirit I do not mean to imply that she was one of those asthenic females who are so often found among the devotees of esthetics. Indeed, no! And she was as far from being a saint. She was the most human, vital, flesh-and-blood woman imaginable. And yet, there was in her character a saintlike quality which compelled one to feel one's self in the presence of a woman who had set herself apart to some holy cause. And that, I think, was exactly it—she *had* set herself apart. She had, literally, given herself so without reserve to her chosen art that she was capable of making any sacrifice for it. It was this capacity for the most intense devotion to an

ideal, I think, which had enabled her, even in her girlhood and particularly after I disappeared from Orchard Hill, to go her chosen way with such serene indifference to the disapproval of the village censors. And it was this spiritual strength which enabled her to deny her love for me, even to the length of sacrificing both herself and me on the altar of her career."

The two young artists worked very hard that winter—Harriet in her dramatic school and Antonio on the stage—but, for all that, they managed to see each other frequently. And they must have felt very close to one another as long-time friends from a country village naturally do in big New York.

"I have sometimes thought," Old Tony said one evening, "that perhaps, had I not been actually on the stage in such a distinguished company while she was only a student, Harriet might have accepted me during those months when we were, in a way, so dependent upon each other." Then the faded old blue eyes twinkled with appreciation of the humor in the situation as he continued, "But, you see, it had always been tacitly accepted between us that she was the great artist and that whatever merit there might be in

my work as an actor it had all been acquired through her. For me to be so far ahead of her now, brought that characteristic pride of hers to the front. At least, she sometimes spoke of my success in a way that made me think this. I confess, too, that I was not above teasing her over the situation."

Harriet graduated in the early spring and joined a small stock company in Rochester. Antonio, at the close of the winter season, accepted a place for the summer in a Cincinnati stock company.

During the months immediately following their newly established friendship they exchanged frequent letters, but stock company work is exacting and gradually, as the weeks passed, they found—that is, Harriet found—less and less time for correspondence other than brief notes about their professional activities and interests.

The following winter, Antonio was again with Augustin Daly's company. Harriet was given a good part in a road company under the management of Roy Donovan. The boy, Bruce Carey, about five years old now, was still with his stepfather and played a child part in the cast.

All that winter, Antonio, in New York, watched

the theatrical papers for news of the road company with which Harriet, Donovan and the child, Bruce, moved from city to city. He wrote to her as often as he dared, and she replied with letters which were friendly enough but were filled mostly with accounts of her promising success, theatrical news of more or less interest, and glowing prospects for her future stage career.

Antonio's work in Cincinnati, the fact that he had been engaged for a second New York season by Augustin Daly, and the favorable notices which the New York critics gave him that winter, led the owner of the Cincinnati company to offer him an engagement as leading man for the summer season.

Then came the news almost too wonderful to be true: Harriet Noël was booked to play leading parts with him. That Roy Donovan was to be their manager did not in the least dim Antonio's happiness. He had never liked Donovan, it is true, but he had not seen the fellow for several years and, well, he, Antonio Latour, would be leading man and Harriet Noël the leading lady; that was all that mattered. He, Antonio Latour, and Harriet Noël, were to play opposite each other as they had played in their school days

in the Orchard Hill Dramatic Club. Their names would appear together on the billboard, in the newspapers, on the programs—everywhere it would be for all the world to see—Antonio Latour and Harriet Noël. He thought of the rehearsals, the intimacies necessary to the plays, and the intimacies outside their rôles which would be inevitable. He thought of the memories which their professional relationship would arouse—of their theater at the foot of the hill, behind the willow thicket in the pasture—of their experiences in the Orchard Hill Dramatic Club productions—of a thousand incidents in their young lives which they had experienced together. In that which meant so much more to him than his career on the stage, this Cincinnati engagement was Antonio's great opportunity.

In the Cincinnati Playhouse, Antonio and Bob Marshal, another member of the company, were chatting before the first rehearsal.

"You have met Miss Noël, our leading lady, I suppose?" said Bob casually.

"Oh, yes." Antonio tried to make his reply as casual as Bob's inquiry, but something in his voice caused his fellow-actor to glance at him curiously.

"Hum-m—and do you know this fellow Donovan?"

"I knew Roy Donovan several years ago," Antonio returned quietly.

But again Antonio's companion looked at him curiously and young Marshal seemed to be searching his memory for something half-forgotten. He spoke with an indifferent air, as if merely making conversation. "I hear that Miss Noël is a very charming person and that everybody who has seen her work predicts great things for her."

"Everybody is right," Antonio returned. "Have you not met her?"

"No. You see, she only arrived in town last night—came on from New York with that boy of Donovan's. She'll be showing up here at the theater some time this forenoon, I suppose. Donovan probably met her train and will bring her to rehearsal." He smiled knowingly, and when Antonio did not speak, asked, with another curious glance, "When did you get in?"

Antonio answered shortly: "Six twenty-eight this morning from New York. I am stopping at the Clairmont." He was thinking bitterly: "So Harriet had been in New York and had not let him know. She had not answered his last letter.

She had come to New York and had not even telephoned him. They could so easily have come on to Cincinnati by the same train. Why was she traveling with the boy, Bruce Carey—Donovan's boy, as he was called? And Donovan, it was assumed, had met her at the train and would bring her to rehearsal."

Bob Marshal was watching his fellow-actor's face now with an expression on his own handsome features which seemed to indicate that he had found that half-forgotten thing for which he had been searching. With his eyes still on Antonio's troubled countenance he said, "Seems to me I heard somewhere that you and Miss Noël grew up together in the same town."

"We did," returned Tony.

"Hum-m," mused young Marshal. Then deliberately, "I suppose you have heard the rumors about our manager and our leading lady?"

Poor Tony did not answer. He felt smothered —buried under a terrible weight which had suddenly fallen upon him. He wanted to struggle but he could not move. He wanted to cry out but something forced him to remain silent. Then he heard a voice which sounded faint and muffled. It was Bob Marshal saying: "I have it straight

from a chum who was in the same company with them on the road last winter, that Miss Noël and Donovan are engaged to be married, so I suppose we will have a pair of newlyweds along with our other troubles this summer."

Better than any one else in all the world, Antonio Latour knew the purity and nobility of Harriet Noël's character. No one understood so well as he, that spiritual quality of her nature which made her capable of any sacrifice for the art to which she was so devoted. That such a woman should give herself to a creature such as he knew Roy Donovan to be, was a thing too monstrous to be believed.

But even as he was torn by that emotional turmoil which his fellow-actor's revelation had raised within him, Antonio understood how it had happened. He remembered how Donovan used to say in his brutal way that all a man needed to make a fortune in the theatrical business was a star and an angel, and that if he could find the star she would eventually find the angel. In Harriet Noël, the manager had found his star. He had succeeded in making her *his* star by craftily appealing to those very elements of her nature which should have been her protection.

The nobility of her own mind and her almost fanatical devotion to her art and to her career had betrayed her. With ostentatious affection and tender care for the motherless boy, Bruce, the man had quieted the instinctive fears and won the respect and confidence of the woman, while with praise of her art and promises to fulfill all her dreams by giving her that place on the stage which was her only goal in life, the manager had won the actress.

When we consider Antonio Latour's ardent nature and remember his unfaltering devotion to Harriet Noël since that day when the boy first became conscious of his girl playmate; when we realize that he was now in the fullness of his manhood, and that his whole life-course had been determined by his love for this girl and woman and the hope of making her his wife, and that his belief in her love for him had never before been shaken, it is not difficult to understand the overwhelming pain of this shock, or to appreciate that by it he was carried to the perilous verge of stark insanity.

As to the details of what happened next, Old Tony remembers nothing. Just what he did—what was said between him and Harriet and

Donovan—the sequence of his actions—are all lost in the wild fury of the emotional storm which had so suddenly burst upon him.

The old actor remembers, as in a dream, that he forced his way into Harriet's dressing room at the theater and confronted her with what he had heard; that she confirmed the report that she and Donovan were to be married; that there was a terrible scene upon which Donovan entered, and that in his madness he attempted to kill the manager, but was prevented by stage hands who came to the rescue in answer to Harriet's screams.

The following days are blank. Old Tony recalls nothing until one morning when he found himself back in the little retreat with its hillside walls of flowers and grass, its screen of willows, and smell of cattle and growing things and warm, moist earth. He must have arrived in Orchard Hill some time during the night and found his way with the instinct of a wounded animal to that spot which he and Harriet called their theater.

Antonio Latour's parents "took him in" because he was their son and it was their Christian duty. But they received him without sympathy or understanding—noble virtues which too seldom grace parental love. They did not overwhelm

him with wailing reproaches, neither did they fail to remind him of their predictions that his wicked career would bring him to an evil end, and they were careful to make their silent suffering obvious.

Of course the good Elder, his Deaconess wife and the villagers, assumed that poor Tony had fallen into disgrace through evil ways of living. Nothing else was to be expected of an actor. Tony could not tell them about Harriet. Had it been possible for him to explain, it would not have helped matters, rather would it have made his sin more unforgivable. So he said nothing and permitted them to think what they pleased.

Within the year Elder and Deaconess Latour passed to their reward, leaving to their wayward son the house where he was born and an income which would barely keep him from starvation. The bulk of the churchman's fortune went to carry the gospel of salvation to the sons of a heathen people in the name of that gentle spirit who taught His followers to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," and who in the name of His Father, God, issued the divine commandment: "Judge not that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge you shall be judged."

Perhaps there are those who will say that Antonio Latour should have gone on with his stage career, or that at the least he should have found some sort of work to do. But Old Tony cries, "How can one work when the heart is dead? Why should one work when there is no one—nothing to work for?"

From all accounts the married life of Roy Donovan and Harriet Noël must have been a troubled existence with their hit or miss way of living on the road or in stock, and with the wife's gradual but certain disillusionment, and the husband's increasingly bitter disappointment. The boy, Bruce Carey, lived with them as if they were his parents. Harriet, from the first, had mothered the lad as any real woman would and she had thought that Donovan loved him as if Bruce were his own son. But now, in the intimacy of their married life, she was not long in discovering that her husband's real interest was not so much in the boy himself as in the money which the man hoped to make through him. With this clearer insight into her manager husband's true character she soon came to understand, too, that his only regard for her was based upon the same hope of

financial gain which made him assume a fatherly love for the child. Then, as Old Tony says, "Pierre made his entrance on the scene."

The situation grew more and more tense and painful. Donovan's treatment of his wife and child only served to intensify Harriet's love for her son. With the mother's heart, soul and mind centered with such passionate devotion upon her child, it was inevitable that the actress' interest in her stage career should wane. The manager, as his wife turned more and more from the stage to motherhood, became more and more cruel and vindictive.

The life which little Pierre lived with his parents and the boy, Bruce, during those years of his earliest memories could not but make a deep and lasting impression upon his sensitive nature. Always he was forced to yield to Bruce who, encouraged by Donovan, bullied the younger lad without mercy and his father never lost an opportunity to make him feel that he was not wanted. It was no wonder that Pierre at an early age became fanatical in his devotion to his mother. She was his only refuge. She was his world. The intensity of his love for her was his childish pro-

test against the cruelty of Donovan and the selfishness of Bruce.

Pierre was four years old when Donovan deserted his wife and child, taking the boy, Bruce, with him.

Several months later, when, quite by chance, Antonio Latour received the news, Harriet and her little son were with a road company which was then playing a week's engagement in Cleveland. Cleveland is only about three hours' travel by train from Orchard Hill, and that evening Antonio was in the audience that waited for the rise of the curtain on the play in which Harriet and her son would appear. With the news that Harriet was free his love had kindled anew the fire of hope in his heart and he had hurried to her, intent upon again offering his devotion. There might still remain for them many years of happiness, he told himself, still believing in her love for him.

In the first act, Harriet and little Pierre would be on together. In the second act, the boy would come on again—this time without his mother—for a short scene with the leading man. Antonio decided not to make his presence in the theater

known to Harriet until after the first act. He felt he could better control his emotions when they met if he had first seen her and her son together on the stage.

As he sat there in that Cleveland theater, one among the hundreds who were waiting for the curtain, Antonio Latour, influenced no doubt by the familiar atmosphere of the playhouse, felt that he was only playing a part. He felt that the audience was watching him, as in the past audiences had watched him on the stage, and that the play which would follow the rise of that curtain for which they were all waiting would be only a play within this larger play in which he and Harriet were acting the leading rôles.

The orchestra began the overture and with the music the actor's mind was carried back to those years when he and Harriet had played their parts in the Orchard Hill Dramatic Club. Again he rehearsed his part with her in their theater in the pasture. He could hear the wild birds singing. He could smell the flowers and trees and grass. He saw the mild-eyed cows lying in the shade of the willows. Again he lived that night when at the close of their play the schoolgirl actress kissed him, and the following evening when she had

deliberately sacrificed their love for a career on the stage.

The house lights were dimmed. The music ceased. The curtain went up on the lighted stage. Antonio Latour sat like one in a trance. While the opening scenes of the piece on the stage were passing, his mind was filled with memories of those events which had brought his stage career to such an unhappy end, and his heart ached with the old pain of his last parting scene with Harriet. Then Harriet made her entrance. The actor in the audience caught his breath in a dry sob which drew a quick glance of curious inquiry from the person who sat beside him on the right.

"To me," Old Tony says when he speaks of that evening, "Harriet was more beautiful than ever. Those cruel experiences to which she had been subjected had brought out more strongly that spiritual quality of her nature. Her vivacious girlhood was now replaced by a stronger, more subdued womanhood. That inner fire which had once illuminated her acting shone still, but with a difference. Then it had been the glow of her genius kindled by her devotion to her art; now it was something else.

"I did not understand at first. I sensed that

the audience was not responding to her acting as in the past it would have done. I was puzzled. Her technique was more finished—she had better command of herself—she had perfected the mechanics of her art; in short, she was more than ever an actress, but there was something wanting. In the vernacular of the stage, Harriet Noël did not go over as she had in the beginning years of her stage career. The audience could find no fault with her—they liked her; but that fire which burned within her kindled no responsive glow in the hearts of the people. Then little Pierre entered and I understood.

"In that play, also, Harriet and her boy were mother and son. And I saw that for Harriet Noël the beauty and the glory of her art had been dimmed by the greater light of her mother love. I saw, too, that Harriet Noël had endowed her child with all the native grace and genius which had promised so much for her. Young as he was, Pierre had that same inner fire; that same compelling personality; that same uncanny power over his audience. All that the actress mother had lost the actor son possessed. I remember thinking, not without a touch of sadness, that as Harriet Noël had sacrificed our love for a stage

career, she had now sacrificed her stage career for love of her son."

Then Old Tony adds earnestly, "I know there are great women artists on the stage who are great mothers too. I could introduce you to a number. And I yield to no one in my admiration for these women who are so wonderfully endowed. I am not discussing the possibilities of womanhood—I am only telling what happened to Harriet Noël."

At the close of the first act, Antonio went back stage and met Harriet and her son. During the second act, when little Pierre was on for his scene with the leading man, Harriet stood in the wings watching her boy while the man who had loved her since their childhood watched her. When the lad received his cue to exit he ran off straight into his mother's arms, and as she held him close and kissed him, Antonio, watching, heard her whisper, "Bravo, bravo, my little Pierre!"

Without even speaking to Harriet of his love, Antonio returned to Orchard Hill.

It was just such a day in late spring as that other day, when the boy making his barefoot way across the pasture toward his home with his string

of fish discovered the girl in that nook behind the willows at the foot of the hill. And it was the same hour of the day. From the trees along the banks of Cherry Creek, red-shouldered blackbirds were calling to their mates that evening was near. In the tall grass and weeds on the hillside, meadow larks were singing their late afternoon melodies. From among the flowers and bushes came the liquid music of bobolinks, the voices of linnet and catbird and thrush, and the plaintive notes of turtle doves. The willows rustled with twittering, chirping tenants. Crows, with an occasional tired "caw, caw," winged their heavy flight towards some distant haven for the night. Cows with heavy udders moved sedately across the pasture toward the barnyard gate.

Antonio, coming slowly along the little path from his lonely old house on the brow of the hill, suddenly stopped and stood as motionless as if by some strange magic he had been turned to stone. Harriet was sitting on that familiar rock in their theater while little Pierre, with low cries of delight and exclamations of happy wonder, was picking wild flowers and running with each new blossom to his mother. The boy was so

intent upon his discoveries and the mother was so absorbed in her son that neither of them had heard Antonio's approach.

At last he went forward—slowly, almost timidly—as if he feared the scene might be only a vision which could vanish.

She rose to greet him and smiled at the bewildered expression of his face.

Doubting, joyous, questioning, he cried, "Harriet!"

"I thought perhaps Pierre and I would find you here," she said, gently freeing her hands from his and seating herself again on the rock. "We arrived early this afternoon."

Pierre came running to her with a flower. "Look, mother! Mother, see! Here is another kind. I found him hiding way down deep in the grass. Tell me the name of this one, mother."

"It is a violet, dear," she answered. Then to Antonio: "Can you realize, Tony, that my little Pierre has never before seen a wild flower? But already he is learning to call them by their names." With a quick burst of feeling she added, "I want him to know everything that you and I knew when we were children, Tony—everything."

"Everything, Harriet?"

She did not reply to this but said to the boy: "Pierre, this is mother's old, old friend, Mr. Antonio Latour. Do you remember, dear, how I told you that Mr. Latour and mother were children together here in Orchard Hill, and about all the things we used to do when he was a boy like you, and I was a little girl?"

"Yes," said Pierre gravely, his gaze fixed intently on Antonio's face, "I remember." With the characteristic poise of a child of the stage he offered his hand. "How do you do, Mr. Latour? I remember meeting you when we played Cleveland last winter. You came back stage to see us." He turned to his mother and, taking the flower from her hand, offered it to Antonio. "This is a violet. Are you fond of violets, Mr. Latour?" As he asked the question his grave eyes—too thoughtful and guarded for his years—were still searching Antonio's face.

"Yes, indeed, I am very fond of violets," Antonio replied heartily, with a quick glance at Harriet who was watching them with an expression on her face not unlike the look in the eyes of her son.

"I'll find some more for you!" cried Pierre,

and ran away to search in the tall grass on the steep banks.

Then Harriet told Antonio that she had left the stage forever, and had come back to Orchard Hill to live in her old home so that her son might grow up in the wholesome out-of-door life of the country. "I want my boy to have the happiness that you and I had in our childhood, Tony," she said passionately. "I want him to do all the things that we did. I want his boyhood to be filled with the woods and hills and fields. He needs to go barefooted—to wade in the creek and build dams and sail boats. He needs to go fishing, and swimming, and skating, and sleigh riding and coasting—to go for wild flowers and nuts and berries—to have picnics and parties. I want him to grow up in the clean strength of country sunshine, and country winds, and country rains. I want him all his life to have memories of a beautiful happy boyhood. He must not in his manhood have only bitter memories. He must forget some things with which since the day of his birth he has been too familiar. If I continue on the stage he will not forget. My career"—her voice faltered, then a brave smile shone through the mist of tears which filled her eyes—

"my career now, Tony, is Pierre—just Pierre. And most of all, Tony," she added softly, "I want my Pierre to have you."

As Harriet finished, her son returned to them with a small handful of violets. "See," he said triumphantly, "I found all these!" He offered the flowers to Antonio. "I picked them for you —there are lots more." And again the boy's gaze was fixed gravely, searchingly, upon the man's face.

Harriet rose hastily and went a little apart from them as if she, too, would gather flowers.

For a long moment Pierre looked after his mother, then he turned back impulsively to Antonio as if he had come to an important decision. "I like you," he said with a smile so like his mother's that the man's heart leaped. "Do you like me?"

"I love you, Pierre," Antonio answered gently.

The boy nodded as if they had reached a satisfactory understanding. Then in his precocious stage manner and with the air of merely stating a well-known fact, he said, "You probably are aware that I have no father."

"Yes," said Antonio, "I know."

"Yes, you see father ran away and left mother

and me and so I have had to take care of mother. I wish you were my father. I wonder why you weren't? You wouldn't run away from us, would you? I think if you don't mind I'll just take you for my father. I'm quite sure mother wouldn't mind, if you don't. You love mother, too, don't you? I know she loves you. So you and I must love each other a lot. We will, won't we? I shall call you Father Tony, if that arrangement would be satisfactory to you."

Of course Orchard Hill believed the worst possible things of this man and woman upon whose youth they had frowned with such suspicion. They tried to question Tony about Harriet's life on the stage.

They whispered to one another conjectures as to the relationship of Harriet and Tony when the actress and the actor lived in New York. They remarked this, and guessed that, and suggested the other. They wondered if Harriet had actually married Donovan, and if she had, why did she still call herself Harriet Noël? They wondered if Pierre really was a legitimate child, and why did the boy call Antonio Latour "father." In short, these self-appointed censors mouthed

every uncharitable suspicion their mean little minds conceived. Like maggots they delighted to infect the wounds which Harriet Noël had received, rather than to heal them with that kindly charity which is the noblest of Christian attainments.

It was only natural that this attitude of the villagers should drive Harriet and Antonio closer together. Each, in the other, found a refuge. Harriet's wish that her boy might have the love of her girlhood lover was fulfilled. To the rare and beautiful companionship of this mother and son, was added now a friendship which in its quality and fullness was as rare and beautiful. Antonio, Harriet and little Pierre spent many hours together that summer and autumn. All the joys the two older people had experienced in their childhood they lived again with Pierre.' And when, in spite of the villagers' attitude toward his mother, the boy found friends and playmates among the neighborhood children, Harriet and Tony were glad.

And all this time, Harriet Noël was developing her son's nature and laying the foundation of a character which would enable him to play in life the part to which she believed he was born. "You

see," Old Tony says, "Harriet saw her son upon those heights in the theatrical world to which she had aspired but could now never attain. All the dreams and hopes of a stage career which from her girlhood she had held for herself, she now held for Pierre. The joy of great accomplishment in her chosen art which she could never, now, realize for herself she believed she would some day know through her son." And then, drawing his frail body erect and proudly lifting his silver-crowned head, the old actor adds: "And I, sir—knowing as I do this mother's mental and spiritual nature, the sacrifices she had made for her art and her hopes for a stage career—all of which were at flood tide in her life when her child was conceived and born—I maintain that if ever a human being was, before birth, cast to play a definite rôle in this life, Pierre Donovan was born to be an actor."

It was during that first summer, too, that little Ann Bevis came into the pattern of Pierre Donovan's life. The Bevises lived on the corner of Deerfield and Academy streets on the edge of the village, not far from Harriet's house, and it happened, quite naturally, that occasionally when Antonio went to meet Harriet and Pierre in their

theater he would find the little girl with them.

The first time it occurred Pierre gravely introduced his little friend. "Father Tony, this is Ann. I have decided to marry Ann when I grow up and we will have twelve children—six boys and six girls. We like children, don't we, Ann?"

The little girl nodded emphatically and Pierre explained Antonio's relationship. "You see, Ann, Father Tony likes children, too, only for some reason he hasn't any, so he has me and now he has you. You will like to have Ann for your little girl, won't you, Father Tony?"

When Antonio had assured them heartily that he would be very happy to have the tiny roly-poly mite of womanhood for his little girl, Pierre said in his quaint grave way, "Well, then, Ann, you must always call him Father Tony just as I do—until we have our children, then, of course, it will be proper to say Grandfather Tony—so *that's* all arranged."

That fall Pierre went to school. Winter passed and again it was spring.

Antonio was washing his breakfast dishes one morning when he heard a knock at the door. Such an occurrence was so unusual that at first he did not answer, but only paused in his housework,

telling himself that he had imagined the sound. But when the knock came again—hurried and imperative—he went quickly, dishcloth in hand, to the door.

It was Harriet, alone and greatly disturbed. She had never before come to Antonio's home and he, for a moment, could only stand and wonder at her presence.

"Forgive me for coming, Tony," she said hurriedly, "but I must talk with you at once."

Without a word he drew aside for her to enter. She stepped into the room and, agitated as she was, could not but notice the household evidences of his poverty and loneliness. As he stood there, dishcloth in hand, in that bare, cheerless apartment with its atmosphere of desolation, Harriet Noël forgot her mission, her eyes filled with tears.

Impulsively she exclaimed, "Oh, Tony dear, I am so sorry. I—I did not realize."

For a moment Antonio Latour faltered, then, commanding himself, he smiled reassuringly and with an air as self-possessed and courtly as he had ever affected on the stage, placed a chair for her. When she was seated he asked with grave concern, "What is it, Harriet? What can I do for you?"

When she could speak, Harriet answered, "It is Bruce, Tony—Bruce Carey."

"Yes," said Antonio slowly, "I remember Bruce."

"He is here," she cried, "here in Orchard Hill. He came to see me last night. He says Roy Donovan sent him to me and told him that I would give him a home and send him to school with my Pierre. What shall I do, Tony, what *can* I do?"

Then, for the first time, Harriet told Antonio about her life with Roy Donovan and the boy, Bruce, and how from her child's infancy they had bullied Pierre and made him fear every one but his mother. After Donovan and Bruce had gone away she had been able to overcome, in a measure, this early influence on her son's character, but she feared that if she took Bruce into her home now, the older boy would reassert his dominion over her little son, which certainly would not be for her boy's good. "Why," she exclaimed, "last night before Bruce had been in the house an hour he ordered Pierre to give up his room to him because he, Bruce, wanted it for himself. And Pierre was ready to yield without protest, just as he used to do. Do you understand—do

you realize, Tony, what such an influence might mean to a nature so sensitive as Pierre's?"

Yes, Antonio understood. But when he told her that for Pierre's sake she must not think of trying to raise the Carey boy with her own son, woman-like, she suddenly began to view the case from the other side. Bruce Carey was an orphan. There was no one in all the world to look after him. The poor boy was not to blame for his ways—Roy Donovan's influence was to blame. Surely now that Donovan was eliminated she could control the situation. She would love to help the homeless boy if she could. Perhaps—perhaps it might even be better for Pierre to grow up with another boy—an older brother, as it were.

So Bruce Carey entered again into the pattern of Pierre's life.

It seems that after abandoning his wife and child, Roy Donovan went from bad to worse until no producer would trust him in any capacity. Then he disappeared from the theatrical world. Why he sent the boy, Bruce, to Harriet, is a mystery. Perhaps he merely wished to rid himself of a burden. Perhaps some trace of decency, or love for the lad's mother, moved him to place the boy under better influence. The boy himself could

give no clew as to why Donovan had sent him to Orchard Hill, nor did he know what had become of his stepfather.

Bruce Carey, even at this age, was a forceful youngster, overbearing, insolent and without mercy when he set himself to gain his own ends. But the masterful one very quickly learned that now, without his stepfather to support him, he must in Harriet's presence exercise judgment in his dominion over his foster brother. So he disciplined little Pierre in secret, and dared the smaller boy to tell. On one occasion only there was rebellion, sudden, decisive and disastrous, to the older boy. Bruce taunted Pierre with a disparaging remark about his mother. It was as if he had touched a match to powder. The larger boy for a moment was too astounded at the unexpected explosion to move, and a stone flung with savage intent by the furious Pierre cut his head open so successfully that he was carried home unconscious with his assailant following in tears.

The year that Bruce was fourteen, Harriet was ill nearly all winter and the management of the vigorous, self-willed boy taxed her at times almost beyond her strength. When Mr. Gordon, one of

our village grocers, offered to give Bruce a home and help him to an education, the boy in return to work in the store out of school hours and during vacations, Antonio insisted that the offer be accepted. The Gordons were excellent people with no children of their own and it would be much better for Bruce to be under the stronger hand of a man of the grocer's character.

The rest which came with the elimination of Bruce from her responsibilities enabled Harriet to rally and, for a while, she seemed quite well and strong again. But before long Antonio was forced to realize the gain was only temporary. Gradually her illness returned. Week by week, as her physical strength and vitality slipped away, the spiritual side of her nature became more evident.

The companionship of mother and son became more and more intimate and understanding. Pierre could not, of course, realize as his Father Tony did, the full import of his mother's failing strength, but the lad's sensitive nature responded instinctively to her need and he became increasingly thoughtful for her. Vacation time came and they were together constantly.

To Antonio, during these slow months of her

illness, Harriet said many things which she could not have mentioned under other circumstances—things which are too sacred for the old actor to whisper in words even to himself as he sits now alone with his memories in their theater.

But of her approaching death, Harriet Noël talked to her old friend with amazing freedom—even with a smile. And Old Tony talks about it now in that same spirit. "You see," the old actor explains—with that love and reverence which always color his voice and manner when he speaks of Harriet—"she made me understand and accept death not as if it were the end of the play—the final curtain, as it is commonly pictured—but as if it were merely the actor's exit from the stage. She spoke of it as naturally as she would have spoken of our work had we been rehearsing our parts in a play. 'I feel,' she would say, 'exactly as I used to feel in a play when I knew that in another minute or two I would receive my cue to exit and, speaking the closing lines of my part, would step from the stage into the wings. You and I, Tony, have played many scenes together on this stage. Some have been very beautiful and some not so pleasing. We have presented in our acting comedy and tragedy, with sometimes a lit-

tle of the melodramatic, and perhaps an occasional touch of burlesque. We have characterized love, ambition, disillusionment, sorrow, success, disappointment and happiness. Sometimes our acting has been good—in other passages our art has been inadequate. Our more perfect scenes have been those which we have played with my little Pierre. They will not ring the curtain down when I speak my exit line and leave the stage, Tony.' She smiled. 'The audience will not even applaud. And the play will go on, dear, on and on and on. You and my little Pierre will continue in the scenes which you will have together following my exit, and if you steal a glance off-stage now and then you will see me standing in the wings watching you. Your exit cue will come next, Tony, and then you and I together will watch Pierre.' "

When it was all over and Antonio sought to comfort little Pierre with the beautiful philosophy which the boy's mother had given him, the child actor said bravely, "I know, Father Tony, mother explained it all to me before she made her exit. I am an actor, too, you know, so I understand."

Harriet had made Antonio the legal guardian of her son and the sole executor of her will. She

left in trust a small sum which by careful economy she had been able to save for Pierre's education. This money was to be given to Pierre when he reached the age of twenty in order that he might have funds for his training in the art of the theater.

Little Pierre wanted to live with his beloved Father Tony but certain of the villagers raised such a storm of protest that Antonio feared they would stir up the entire community and have him declared by the court morally unfit to act as the boy's guardian. When he recalls this part of his story, the old actor always laughs and says, "I was damned lucky they did not burn me at the stake." So a home for Pierre was found with a childless couple whose religion Orchard Hill approved. They would see to it that the boy went to school and to Sunday school and church.

"And now that his actress mother is gone," said Orchard Hill triumphantly, "and that horrid actor, Antonio Latour, has found that he cannot do what he pleases with her son, Pierre Donovan will have a chance."

Old Tony chuckles, "There I was, unanimously voted the most disreputable, immoral and worthless character Orchard Hill had ever produced—

their perennial prize exhibit to prove the terrible effect of evil living—and I might have reminded them that I had been raised exactly as they proposed to raise Pierre. But I did not. And the poor fools never knew how fervently I thanked God that Pierre could have such a good home. The couple was a kindly pair who had always wanted children. The man was a generous provider and his wife a most excellent cook. Orchard Hill was right—Harriet Noël's son would have a chance. As for my unholy influence, I was confident that Pierre and I could manage somehow."

But while Orchard Hill reckoned with so much satisfaction that Harriet Noël had gone out of her son's life, the actress mother had impressed herself too strongly upon the sensitive nature of her son for the years to efface her image. To Pierre and his Father Tony her presence continued vivid and real as if, indeed, she were—in her own words—standing in the wings. They habitually spoke of her as if she were still living in the flesh. And the bond between Harriet's son and Antonio grew stronger as the one grew toward manhood and the other toward old age. Increasingly dear to Pierre was his Father Tony; increasingly dear

to the old actor was the son of the woman he had loved.

Many wonderful hours did Antonio spend with Harriet's boy in that little hillside retreat behind the willows in the pasture. Many times in his young manhood did Pierre and the old actor in that sacred place speak of the things which lay deep in their hearts: of Pierre's mother and her dreams for him; of the theater and its noble art; of his training for the stage; his career; and the future which was to place his name among the truly great actors of his generation.

Old Tony, when he recalls Pierre's young manhood says, "He was a handsome youngster—tall, beautifully formed and strong, with fine clear-cut features, and eyes and hair like his mother's. I have never known another soul that lived so joyously. With his abundant physical health and energy he had the overflowing play-spirit of a young animal. He loved life as he loved the theater. To him, life was a glorious play, the world a beautiful playhouse and every person an interesting character acting a definite part. He was the most forgetful human being I ever saw, but he never wavered in his purpose to become a

great actor; and while he seemed utterly lacking in materialism he hoarded his small savings with miserly care to the end that he might add to the sum which his mother had left in trust for his education for the stage. Often when we talked of the theater and his career I would see in his eyes that look which was so characteristic of Harriet—as if he were seeing things invisible to me and hearing things which I could not hear. Harriet did not speak idle words when she said: 'My career—Pierre is my career.' "

It was natural that young Pierre should take a generous part in the amateur dramatic efforts of the community, and in this he was so like his actress mother that those who had known Harriet in her girlhood whispered anew the sorry old scandals which had never had other foundation than the imagination of little minds. It was his gift for acting, with these whispered memories of his mother, together with the feeling that Harriet Noël's son was somehow different from the ordinary Orchard Hill youth, I think, which made the villagers so often speak of him with a doubtful smile and a sad shake of the head. "Poor Pierre," they would say, "he's a nice boy but he can't never amount to much with the start he got from his

actress maw and that good-fer-nothing old actor, Tony Latour."

Because Orchard Hill was only a small country village the relationship between Pierre and Bruce Carey continued almost as if they lived under the same roof. Whenever an occasion arose the older boy asserted his authority and while Pierre outgrew his childish fear of the domineering Bruce, his habit of yielding to him remained. This difference in the natures of the two boys was most noticeable to watchful Old Tony in the matter of their mutual interest in Ann Bevis—the little girl whom Pierre at a very early age had decided to marry.

"Ann's father, Martin Bevis, and I," Old Tony explains, "went to school together. When Martin graduated from the academy—the year I ran away to become an actor—he took a position as bookkeeper in the First National Bank. Forty years later he is still a bookkeeper in the First National Bank. And that," the old actor declares, with a meaning twinkle in his faded blue eyes, "is a full and complete characterization of Martin Bevis!"

Mrs. Bevis took care of her husband until little Ann was thirteen. Then the devoted wife and

mother passed to her well earned and much needed rest and the responsibility of taking care of Martin fell upon the sturdy shoulders of his daughter. She was a most lovable girl, with a sweet madonna-like face and that mother spirit which such girls have. Somehow she managed to attend the public schools and with her practical home-making experience which made her so dependable and her very real charm, she was a great favorite.

Long before their school days were over, Pierre and Bruce were rivals for the favors of Ann. When she chose Pierre, Bruce would be angry—as if the girl were pledged exclusively to him. When she favored Bruce, Pierre would make merry of his defeat. When she seemed to prefer some other lad, Pierre would jestingly console Bruce, much to the older boy's disgust. As for Ann, she laughingly said she loved them all.

Bruce, his school days ended, accepted a position as clerk in the First National Bank. Pierre, when he finished school, accepted a position at the soda fountain end of the Owl Drug Store—the store which his mother's father, "Doc" Noël, had once owned.

"You see, Father Tony," Pierre explained when

they discussed the question, "that soda fountain is the best place in Orchard Hill for me to study character. It is only for two years—then I'll have the money which mother left for me and I'll beat it straight to New York and the American Academy of Dramatic Art. If only I could have that money now I would start to-night, but I can't, so I might as well put in the time with something that will be the most use to me in my stage work later."

"What does Ann think about it?" Old Tony asked gently.

Pierre moved uneasily. "Ann doesn't want me to be a soda jerk. She wants me to go into something with a future—some sort of a place where I can work up—like Bruce has in the bank, you know. She says I might change my mind about the stage if I got interested in a real job. I guess she is right, in a way. Everybody will think I am not amounting to much, I suppose, but we should worry about what people think. You and mother and I know what it is all about. Ann will understand some day. Besides," he added without a trace of malice or ill feeling, but with an odd wistful note in his voice, "Bruce is the Orchard Hill star of our family."

At this Antonio merely grunted a responsive "humph," which might have meant anything or nothing.

Then for a long time the young man was silent and the older man saw in his eyes that far-away look which Antonio in his young manhood days had so often seen in the eyes of Pierre's mother.

At last Pierre spoke slowly: "I don't believe that an actor—I mean a young actor just at the beginning of his career—has any right to marry, do you, Father Tony?"

Antonio answered with care, "It certainly would be a hazardous adventure for the lady, and it would as certainly be a terrible handicap to the young actor. It would be almost a miracle, I think, if such a marriage did not end disastrously."

Pierre nodded a reluctant agreement. Then he said in what he tried to make a matter-of-fact tone: "Of course it would be an impossible thing for a decent fellow to do. If a man really loves a girl he is bound to think of what her future would be if she were to marry him. And when a fellow has fully determined upon a stage career I think he must simply make up his mind to

go it alone. Of course, if marrying the girl means more to him than his career then he should give up his career and do something else that will make it possible for them to marry. With me, now—well, I simply *couldn't* give up the theater. I think I would almost sacrifice even you, Father Tony, if my career demanded it."

We can imagine how vividly the boy's words brought back to Antonio Latour memories of Harriet Noël and that scene in their little hillside theater when she had chosen between her love and her art.

"What could I say?" cries the old actor. "I sat there as if I were in a dream. God! how it all came back to me."

Presently Pierre said wistfully, "Do you know, Father Tony, I sometimes wish that I had been born with a little different nature. I mean, I wish I was more what people call practical—that I cared more for money and business and that sort of thing. If I was more like Bruce now—Bruce will have no troubles about marrying and having a family and all that. When Bruce finds the girl he wants he'll just up and marry her—there'll be nothing to hinder him. He won't need to bother

about marriage interfering with his career. A wife will be a help to him. Good old Bruce—he's a lucky dog, isn't he?"

Pierre had been working at the soda fountain nearly a year when Bruce and Ann were married. The young couple began their life together in the Bevis home where Ann had kept house for her father ever since her mother's death. Ann had made this a condition of her marriage and her father was to live with them so that she might continue taking care of him. That same year, the old couple with whom Pierre lived moved to Cleveland to be near their only relatives in their old age and Pierre went to board with the Careys.

Old Tony says, "It was Ann's idea. The girl felt that Pierre was so much like a brother to Bruce that it was their duty to give him a home so that she could look after him."

It was about three months before Pierre's twentieth birthday when Pierre first mentioned to his Father Tony the wonderful financial opportunity that had come to Ann's husband. Bruce was offered at ground-floor prices a substantial interest in a Nevada gold mine which was certain to develop into one of the richest mines ever known.

"It's a darned shame that Bruce can't grab this chance to make some real money," said Pierre. "Martin Bevis says it is the opportunity of a lifetime. He says the mine is certain to produce millions and that such a chance may never come to Bruce again. Bruce, you know, is a natural-born money-maker and all he needs is a little capital to give him a start. It would mean a lot to Ann if Bruce could get into something big. If he sticks in that dinky Orchard Hill First National all his life he'll never get anywhere."

"And who is this benevolent person who wants to sell Bruce a gold mine in Nevada?" Antonio asked dryly.

"Martin didn't mention his name," returned Pierre, "just said that he was an old friend who wanted to let Bruce in on a good thing. Martin says he is all right."

"Oh, Martin Bevis knows this Nevada mine promoter, does he?"

"I suppose so. He says the man is all right and that the investment is absolutely safe and certain to bring enormous returns. Martin told me about a lot of men—some of the biggest financiers in the country—who got their first start by just such a

chance as this. What do you think about it, Father Tony?"

"What do I think about what, Pierre?"

"Why, this proposition that I've been telling you about—this Nevada gold mine."

"I don't know anything about it, Pierre—do you?"

"I know what Bruce and Martin Bevis tell me."

"Well, why doesn't Bruce go ahead and invest if he and Martin think this mine is such a good thing?"

"Bruce can't—he hasn't the money."

"Oh, I see! Bruce and Martin want you to put your money—the money which your mother left for your dramatic schooling—into this mining scheme. Is that it?"

Pierre's voice was troubled as he answered: "Bruce says if I will let him invest the money he can more than double it for me in a year, and that it will give him the start he needs. I—I'd like to help Bruce—and Ann. I think I ought to help them if I could. I'm sure mother would want me to—don't you think so, Father Tony?"

When the old actor recalls this incident in his story he lifts his silver-white head defiantly and his faded blue eyes flash with righteous indigna-

tion. "You can imagine," he says, "what I advised Harriet's son to do with the little inheritance which, as the executor of his mother's will, I would turn over to him on his twentieth birthday. And you can imagine what I said to Bruce Carey and that old fool, Martin Bevis, for trying to rush a boy like Pierre into their money-making schemes —upsetting all his plans, smashing his dreams, and like as not ruining his whole life, to say nothing of Harriet's hopes and plans for her son. It was monstrous! It was damnable! It was the most selfish and cruel proposition that could be conceived! Ann was as indignant as I and put her foot down good and hard against the scheme, forbidding her father and Bruce ever to mention it to Pierre again."

But while the matter was apparently settled and Pierre went joyously ahead with his plans for entering the New York school, Pierre's guardian worried not a little over what might happen—even at the last minute—to defeat Pierre's purpose to fulfill all that his mother had dreamed for him and to realize his own dearest ambition. The old actor says: "I could not believe that Bruce Carey would cease his efforts to persuade Pierre to turn his school money over to him. I

remembered how from his infancy Harriet's son had yielded to the older boy's will. I knew so well Pierre's generous impulsive nature. I trembled to think what might happen when, with his inheritance in his own hand, he would be free to do with it as he chose."

In short, Antonio Latour was too wise not to realize that his beloved Pierre was approaching a very real crisis in his life. The old actor's years of unfaltering love for Harriet Noël, his devotion to her memory and his unfailing affection for her son made the approaching situation no less a crisis in the life of Antonio Latour, himself.

"Harriet's presence in those days," Old Tony says, "was very real. I could almost see her standing in the wings."

II

THE PLAY

The play's the thing. . . .

HAMLET, ACT III, SCENE 2.

ACT I

SCENE I

IT was one of those summer days when all nature seems to be surfeited with the wine of life and, as if overcome by the abundance and richness of its own fertility, sinks into satisfied and lazy enjoyment of the hour. Vagrant cloud shadows drifted leisurely over quiet hillside seas of corn and wheat and oats and woods and meadows. In the valley pastures cattle dozed in the shade of the willows or idled knee-deep in the cool waters of Cherry Creek. The trees in the old Academy yard, the elms that arch above the street which leads to the Carey home, and the great maples that stretch their leafy arms over the house itself seemed to be sleeping. The indolent summer air stole with so little energy through the open window of the room where Ann was ironing that the muslin curtain barely stirred.

The young housewife, dressed in a low-necked, sleeveless dress of cool blue gingham, had set up her ironing board in the large living and dining

room because it was cooler there. The open door into the kitchen gave her ready access with her irons to the stove. As she worked she was thinking of Pierre—of Pierre and Bruce and herself.

For nearly two years, now, Pierre had been a member of the Carey household, and Ann had looked after him as she had looked after her husband and her father. Ann had come to feel that she knew Pierre very well—almost as intimately as she knew her husband. She told herself that she understood Pierre better than any one except, perhaps, Father Tony. She was conscious, too, without ever having considered the matter that Pierre supplied a need in her life which Bruce could never satisfy. Bruce, the capable, hard-working, money-wise bank clerk, was bound to be a rich man some day, everybody said, and Ann, too, had faith that her husband's financial success was only a matter of time. She was proud to be Bruce Carey's wife, as any girl might well be, but suppose—suppose she had married Pierre? Sometimes she wished that Bruce were a little more like Pierre. Some day she and Bruce would have children. She hoped the first would be a boy. They would name him Pierre.

The front door bell rang. Ann stepped quickly into the kitchen and placed her flat-iron on the stove. Then coming back through the living room, smoothing her hair and touching her dress as women will, she went into the front hall, returning a moment later with old Tony Latour.

The old actor's clothing was threadbare but carefully brushed; his cuffs and collar if frayed were clean; he wore a wide flowing tie and the usual flower in the lapel of his poor old coat. In one hand he held his ancient hat; in the other he carried a manuscript.

As they entered the living room, Ann said cheerfully, "I thought you would be coming over this afternoon, Father Tony. We are going to miss Pierre terribly, aren't we?"

Peering about anxiously as if he had come on some mission of rather more than ordinary importance, Old Tony asked with nervous eagerness, "Is Pierre not in?"

"He just left," Ann returned. "Said he was going down to the drug store to tell Orchard Hill good-by and to teach his understudy at the soda fountain the technique of serving a nut sundae or a coke artistically. Honest to goodness, Father

Tony, you would die to see him act out the way that new soda jerk serves the customers. You know how Pierre always waits on people as if he were acting in a play on the stage. Everybody says he is as good as a show."

They laughed together and Old Tony said admiringly, but more to himself than to Ann, "Always the actor, Ann, always the actor. The boy was born to it. His mother—"

"Come sit here by the window, Father Tony," said Ann placing a chair for the old gentleman. "Let me take your hat."

As the old actor seated himself, he gave her his hat, but when she would have taken the manuscript he clung to it almost as if he were frightened. "No, no—I—I'll just keep that if you don't mind."

She smiled at his agitation and said gaily, "I'll bet it's a good-by gift for Pierre—some kind of a book about the theater, or plays, or actors, I suppose."

The old gentleman looked up at her in sudden agitation—almost fear. "Hasn't Pierre told you about it?"

"About what, Father Tony?"

"Why—why, about this, Ann," he held up the

manuscript, watching her face with anxious eagerness.

"No, Father Tony, Pierre hasn't said anything to me—what is it?"

The old actor was quite disturbed by this and answered hurriedly, "Oh, it's nothing, Ann—nothing at all." Handling the manuscript he made as if to speak to Ann about it, hesitated then asked anxiously: "You are sure that Pierre hasn't changed his mind about going away to school?"

"I should say not—Pierre couldn't change his mind about that!"

"And he is really leaving for New York and the American Academy of Dramatic Art this afternoon?"

Ann held up a suit of underwear, inspected it carefully and arranged it on the ironing board. "I'm ironing these last few things for him." She stepped into the kitchen and exchanged the flatiron for a hot one from the stove. "It will seem strange with Pierre gone, Father Tony. I shall miss doing his things—washing and ironing and mending. He's terribly hard on his clothes. I wonder who will sew his buttons on and darn his socks in New York?" She turned her head away

from Old Tony's questioning gaze, but not before he had seen the tears in her eyes.

"You have been very good to Pierre, Ann. Not many young couples would care to make a home for one who was not even a member of the family as you and Bruce have done for Pierre. It would be different if he were a relative."

"One more hasn't mattered," Ann returned. "We already had my father, you know. Besides, Pierre's board money has helped out a lot. Bruce's salary isn't much yet—he's only a clerk in the bank."

"Pierre has made a lot of extra work for you just the same," Old Tony insisted.

The young woman paused in her work and cried ardently, "But Father Tony, I love Pierre; he is such a joy to me."

The old actor, watching her, thought how little she realized that her face and eyes and voice and manner told even more than her simple words.

"We all love Pierre," she added in defense. "And Pierre loves you, I think, Father Tony, better than any one else in all the world. When he is a great and famous actor he will say it was because you helped him and encouraged him and believed in him."

Old Tony laughed. "Our good villagers here in Orchard Hill do not exactly agree with you, my dear, as to the value of my influence over Harriet Noël's son."

Ann tossed her head. "Oh, these Orchard Hill busybodies—they make me tired."

The old actor laughed again, then playing the part of a village gossip he said, "That thar good-fer-nothin' old actor, Tony Latour, he's a disgrace to the community. Ain't satisfied with bringin' sorrer an' gray hairs to his paw an' maw, an' shame to the church by runnin' away and bein' a play actor when everybody thought he was goin' to be a preacher, but he's got to go an' put the same wicked ideas into young Pierre Donovan's head. The unprincipled old reprobate! Just as if poor Pierre didn't have enough to overcome in his natural bent toward actin' which he inherited from his actress maw, Tony Latour'll plumb ruin the boy if we don't watch out. Yes and indeed he will."

"Just you wait, Father Tony," said Ann, "Orchard Hill will sing a different tune about our Pierre some day."

At this Old Tony's manner changed. The

mocking smile vanished from his face, the village gossip disappeared. Drawing himself proudly erect, with flashing eyes and a voice of righteous indignation, he cried: "Damn their miserable little starveling souls! How can such poor materialistic cattle understand an artist like Pierre Donovan? Did Orchard Hill ever really know the boy's mother, Harriet Noël? They did not! Born and reared in their very midst, Harriet to these ignorant bigoted little-souled clods remained to the day of her death a stranger. And Harriet's son to them is only a soda fountain boy in the Owl Drug Store. Because Pierre loves the drama and the theater, and plays his parts in our village Dramatic Club shows like a professional, they think him impractical, no good; that he will never amount to anything. He is the village clown, the stage-struck joke of the community. They laugh at him and pity him, and curse me, the worthless old actor, because I understand him! Blast their little pin-headed prejudices! Damn their purblind eyes! Thank God I have the intelligence and grace to understand and appreciate genius. I tell you, Pierre Donovan is a Booth, a Mansfield! He is the greatest actor of his generation! These Orchard Hill fools see the soda

fountain clerk; I see the great artist soul of Harriet Noël's son—the soul which he inherited from her. Soda fountain clerk!"

The old actor paused, suddenly realizing that he had been declaiming to Ann as if he were addressing a great audience. Dropping his theatrical pose with an embarrassed laugh he said, "There, there, my dear, forgive me. Really, you know, I was quite carried away with my own eloquence." He chuckled again, then with quick fire cried with tremendous earnestness: "But I mean every word of it—every damn word!"

"Indeed you are right about Pierre, Father Tony, but just you wait—some day Orchard Hill will be mighty proud of our Pierre."

"Yes, some day," retorted the old actor scornfully. "Some day these imbeciles will read in their Sunday papers about Pierre Donovan, the distinguished actor. *Then they will think him great.* Morons—cattle! If Pierre should never speak a line on the stage he would be no less the great artist. Pierre is great because he is a great soul. And he is as great to-day, as a soda fountain clerk here in Orchard Hill, as he will ever be on the stage of the largest theater in the world. Success does not make an artist great—success

is merely recognition of the artist's greatness."

"Well, I hope you do not include me among those who do not appreciate Pierre," said Ann—a little resentfully.

The old actor hastened to reassure her. "No, no, Ann dear—I know—I know what Pierre is to you. I know what you are to Pierre, too."

Ann was a little embarrassed by this. She was not quite sure that Old Tony did not mean a bit more than she wanted him to mean. Did the old actor, indeed, know all that Pierre was to her? Was she, herself, quite sure that she knew? After all, she was Bruce Carey's wife. "I have always felt that Pierre was different from ordinary people," she said. "He does not belong in Orchard Hill. The world to which Pierre belongs is as far from this world in which I—in which we live—as heaven is from earth."

The old actor nodded in agreement, watching her with an intent and knowing, but kindly, expression in his faded blue eyes. Slowly he said: "And the boy is going now into his own world—the world to which he was born—the world of the theater—of dramatic art."

Ann, forgetting herself, cried desperately, "For me, Father Tony, it will be as if Pierre were dead.

He will never come back to live in my Orchard Hill world again. I feel exactly as if he were dying this afternoon and I was telling him good-by forever. Oh, I shall miss him terribly." Realizing suddenly what her words might signify to the old actor she turned away and buried her face in her hands. "I—I do not mean anything untrue to Bruce," she sobbed. "Please, Father Tony, don't think that."

The old gentleman went to her and put his arms lovingly around her quivering shoulders. "There, there, my dear, I understand—I know. It's all right, it's all right."

When Ann had regained her composure, the old actor said anxiously, "But you still want Pierre to go, don't you, Ann? You still think it is better that he should use the money which his mother left for his schooling in dramatic art as she hoped he would use it, don't you?"

She turned quickly. "Of course I do," she cried. "Pierre must not think of letting Bruce use his school money as Bruce wants to do."

"Do you know anything about this Nevada gold mining scheme that your husband wants Pierre to put his school money into?"

"Only what Bruce and father say about it."

"Are you sure that Pierre hasn't already turned his school money over to Bruce?"

"I know he hasn't. Pierre is going away to New York this afternoon exactly as you and he planned. You only gave him his inheritance yesterday, you know."

"As executor of his mother's will, I was obliged to give him the money on his twentieth birthday. But it may not be too late yet for Bruce to persuade him. Ever since they were children, Pierre has always done what Bruce wanted him to do. As long as I held his school money in trust I could protect Pierre from his well-meaning friends who tell him he is throwing his inheritance away if he uses it to educate himself for the stage. But now that he has his money in his own hands I—I have been dreadfully afraid, Ann, that the boy might, even at the last moment, let himself be persuaded. He is so impulsive and generous and he has all his life yielded to Bruce in everything."

The old actor, in his agitated state of mind, handled the manuscript nervously, looking from the crudely bound volume to Ann, and back to the manuscript, as if he wanted but feared to say something more.

Ann laughed. "If you could have heard Pierre

last night you wouldn't worry about Bruce or any one else persuading him."

At this, the old actor's interest became painfully intense. He sat very still, hugging the manuscript to his breast and gazing at Ann with almost desperate eagerness. "Why—what happened last night, Ann?"

"Well," said Ann, "Pierre came home just at supper time. He said he had been with you all the afternoon and of course Bruce asked him if you had given him his money."

Old Tony was leaning forward in his chair.

"Pierre said, yes, you had given him his inheritance and that he was leaving for that school in New York to-day just as you and he had planned —as his mother had hoped he would do when she left the money for him."

The old actor nodded. "Yes, yes."

Ann continued: "Then Bruce and father started in again to persuade Pierre to let Bruce use his school money in that Nevada gold mine, but before they were hardly started, Pierre jumped to his feet and ordered them to shut up."

"Bravo! Bravo!" ejaculated the old actor.

"We were all so astonished we simply gasped," said Ann.

Old Tony chuckled.

Ann went on, "No one ever saw Pierre like *that* before. You know how he is—always so gentle and polite and, well, sort of easy. But last night! Why, Father Tony, he was hard as iron. He almost frightened me."

The old actor laughed and hugged his manuscript and slapped his thin old leg in a gay triumphant humor.

"And the way Pierre lectured Bruce and father about their being money mad and ready to sell their souls for dollars and all that—Well! You should have seen Bruce and father—me, too! It would have been funny if Pierre hadn't been so terribly in earnest."

The old actor's face was beaming. "Told Bruce and Martin where to go to, with their gold mining schemes, did he? Good! Good! I hoped he would do it—I knew the boy had it in him if only he could be aroused to the real issue. *Now* let anybody try to side-track him! Just let them try!"

Old Tony was so elated that Ann could not fail to grasp that there was something behind it all which she did not know. Suddenly she asked: "What did you say to Pierre yesterday afternoon

when you gave him his inheritance, Father Tony?"

Old Tony chuckled. "Not much, Ann. I didn't *say* much of anything."

"Well," she retorted, "if you didn't *say* anything you must have *done* something to make him stand up to Bruce like that—what did you do to him?"

"Well, Ann—first I took the boy to that little nook behind the willows, at the foot of the hill in the pasture—you know the place—Pierre and I call it our theater."

"Of course I know the place," Ann returned gently. "And I know that you and Pierre's mother, when you were young here in Orchard Hill, used to call it your theater, too."

At this the old actor's mind seemed to slip away into the past. "That was a long, long time ago, my dear," he said slowly.

"But what happened to Pierre, in his mother's theater yesterday, Father Tony?"

"Oh yes—well, I gave Pierre his inheritance—it was his twentieth birthday, you know."

"Yes, I know, but you must have *said* something or *done* something more than that, because I tell you I know from what Pierre said to Bruce and father—from his manner and everything—

that something had happened to him. You say yourself, you have been afraid Bruce would persuade Pierre to give up his school money because Pierre has always done whatever Bruce told him to do. But last night—why, Pierre even told Bruce he would see him in hell before he would let him touch a single penny of his school money. What *did* you do to change Pierre like that, Father Tony?"

The old actor laughed. "It must have been my play that did it, Ann."

"Your play?" Ann had never before heard of Old Tony's play.

"Yes, you see, I have written a play for Pierre." He indicated the manuscript.

"Oh, how wonderful," cried Ann.

Old Tony laughed with pleased embarrassment. "It's not very wonderful, I'm afraid."

Ann, not seeing the connection but humoring the old gentleman as one might humor a child, asked: "And has Pierre known that you were writing a play for him?"

Old Tony laughed triumphantly. "He knows it *now*. Oh, yes, Pierre knows about my play now. He didn't know about it though until yesterday afternoon."

"Oh-h-h, so that's what happened to him," mused Ann beginning to see that there was some connection, but still puzzled.

"Yes, you see I got the idea about three months ago when Bruce first talked to Pierre about this Nevada gold mining scheme. I got to thinking about all that *might* happen if Pierre should give in to Bruce and your father and let Bruce have his school money, and so I wrote a play about it. And yesterday afternoon in our theater when I gave Pierre his inheritance as executor of his mother's will, I—we read my play. That is, I read it to him. That was the first Pierre knew that I had written it."

"I see," said Ann, still mystified and growing more interested.

The old actor held up his manuscript. "I brought this copy over this afternoon for Pierre to take with him—he can just put it in his trunk."

"But won't you tell me about your play, Father Tony?"

The old actor looked down at his manuscript, then turned his face up to her to say shyly, "Would you like to hear it?"

"Oh, I'd love to! What is the title?"

Old Tony put on his spectacles and clearing his

throat read the title from the manuscript: " 'Exit' —a play in three acts, written for Pierre Donovan by Antonio Latour." He raised his eyes to Ann and added reverently, "I have inscribed it to the memory of Pierre's mother, Harriet Noël, a great actress who endowed her son with her own artist soul."

"How splendid," cried Ann. "And is Pierre in the play?"

"Oh, yes, it is all about Pierre."

"Of course. How stupid of me not to know that. And who else is in the play with Pierre?"

"You, your father, Bruce, myself, and a lot of other people."

"Really? Am *I* in your play? But you know, Father Tony, I'm just no good in plays. Pierre never could teach me to act, not even the tiniest bits. I'm just dumb, I guess."

"You are in the play, Ann, because you are a most important factor in Pierre's life and character."

"I—I don't think I understand," faltered Ann.

"Why, you see, Ann, a person's life and character are one and the same thing. A man *lives* what he *is*—he *is* what he *lives*. And character, my dear, does not happen. Character—that

which a person really *is*—is the result of certain combinations of what I call life forces. Love, hate, ambition, avarice, idealism, materialism, selfishness, generosity—all the elements which combine in different proportions to form different characters are the elements or forces of which life is made. And these forces in various proportions enter into the making of each individual life *always* through other lives. Whether by heredity or environment, we are made—our characters are formed, our individual lives are shaped by other lives, through which these life forces play upon us."

"Yes, of course," agreed Ann, "and the different combinations of these life forces, as you call them, make the difference in people.'

"Exactly," cried the old actor. "There are as many different combinations of these life forces as there are different characters. The forces are the same—the patterns they make are different, that is all. And life and plays, my dear, are made of exactly the same stuff."

"I never thought of that," said Ann doubtfully.

"It is true just the same," retorted Old Tony. "And so, Ann, I have made my play, 'Exit,' which

I wrote for our Pierre out of the very same life forces which have entered into the making of Pierre himself. Of course, you understand that in my play I have combined these forces so that the pattern is different from what we hope the pattern of Pierre's actual life experience will be. I have made the pattern of my play, 'Exit,' as Pierre's experience might be if he yielded to Bruce and failed to be true to himself."

"Oh, I see," cried Ann. "I understand now. But Pierre in your play, is the same Pierre that we know and love, isn't he?"

"Exactly the same Pierre, my dear. And because you, Ann, have helped to make him what he is, you are in the play."

"Who else is in the play, Father Tony?"

The old actor read from his manuscript:

"CAST OF CHARACTERS

HARRIET NOEL—Pierre Donovan's mother,
ANN CAREY—A young housewife,
ANTONIO LATOUR—An old actor,
MARTIN BEVIS—Ann's father—bookkeeper in the bank,
BRUCE CAREY—Ann's husband—clerk in the bank,

PIERRE DONOVAN—A soda fountain clerk—
a great actor,
EDWARD DAYTON—President of the bank,
EDWARD WILSON—Teller in the bank,
JACK BOLTON—Sheriff of Orchard County,
GEORGE SCOTT—Deputy,
COLORADO BILL—A promoter of a Nevada gold
mine,
JIMMIE HARRIGAN—An old desert prospector,
SHERIFF, Red Butte, Nevada,
DEPUTIES AND OTHERS."

"But, Father Tony, how can Pierre's mother be in your play?"

Old Tony bowed his head and fumbled blindly over the leaves of his manuscript. "Pierre's mother, Ann, is not on the stage—she is standing in the wings."

"Oh!" said Ann softly. Then she stole behind the old gentleman's chair and putting her arms about his neck kissed his silvery white hair.

The old actor raised his head with a grateful smile and Ann, as she moved away, said cheerfully, "Read me more of your play, Father Tony."

Old Tony read from his manuscript: "Act one, scene one: The living room of a comfortable but

unpretentious small-town home. There is a dining table not far from an open door through which the kitchen and the kitchen stove can be seen. An archway leads to the front hall and the foot of the stairs. Another door opens on a bedroom. Against the wall is an old-fashioned writing desk with paper and envelopes."

"Why—why, Father Tony!" Ann exclaimed, looking about the room as if comparing the description which the old actor had just read with the scene itself, "why that is our own living room right here, just as it is this very minute!"

Old Tony, without looking up from his manuscript, continued reading: "Time: midsummer—late afternoon."

"Oh, but it's not late," Ann interrupted quickly, "it is only a quarter of two."

Old Tony smiled, "It is late in the play, Ann. You are getting supper."

"But I'm not—I'm ironing Pierre's things."

The old actor laughed. "In the play you are getting supper."

Ann returned doubtfully, "Oh, in the play—I see." She placed the garments she had been ironing on the table and, carrying the ironing board into the kitchen, began doing things about

the stove as if she were going to prepare a meal.

Old Tony watched her as a director might watch an actress performing a bit of stage business. Then referring to his manuscript he continued: "Pierre is leaving to-morrow morning for New York to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Art."

Ann, standing in the kitchen doorway, cried, "But, Father Tony, Pierre is leaving for New York this afternoon—not to-morrow morning—this afternoon, on the train that goes at five fifty-three."

The old actor explained with smiling patience: "In the play, Ann," he held up the manuscript to emphasize his meaning. "In my play, 'Exit,' Pierre is leaving Orchard Hill on the six-fifteen to-morrow morning."

For a moment Ann looked puzzled, then suddenly it was all clear to her and she cried, "Oh-h-h, of course! How stupid of me. Pierre really *is* leaving this afternoon, but in the play he is leaving to-morrow morning. I get you *now,* Father Tony. What comes next?"

The old actor consulted his manuscript: "Pierre is upstairs packing his trunk."

"Oh, is Pierre home?" exclaimed Ann. "When

did he come in? He said he would be gone all the afternoon."

"No, no, Ann," the old actor laughed. "Pierre has not come home yet. But in the play—in the play, dear, Pierre is upstairs packing his trunk."

Ann thought this over. Then she took the garments she had been ironing from the table and carrying them into the hall put them on the lower step of the stairs. For a moment she stood looking up to the floor above wonderingly, then facing toward Old Tony she said: "You say that, in your play, Pierre is upstairs?"

"Yes."

She turned again slowly, doubtfully and called up the stairway: "Pierre—oh—Pierre—here are your things."

Pierre's voice answered from upstairs, "All right, Ann, thank you."

Ann came slowly back into the living room.

Old Tony read from the manuscript: "It would be a shameful thing, Ann, if your husband should use Pierre's school money in this Nevada gold mining scheme as he is trying to persuade Pierre to let him do."

"But I tell you, Father Tony, you need not fear that Pierre will let Bruce have his school money."

Tony, still reading from the manuscript, returned, "I am not so sure, Ann. Pierre would do anything for *you*."

"For me?"

Tony turned a page of the manuscript and read: "I don't think you quite realize how much Pierre cares for you, Ann."

"And I am sure nobody realizes how much I love Pierre—I mean, how much we all love him."

Old Tony read: "Enter Martin Bevis, Ann's father."

As if to punctuate the old actor's words, the noise of the front door being slammed shut sounded through the house. Old Tony looked up from his manuscript; Ann turned and they were both gazing expectantly toward the hall as Martin Bevis appeared in the archway.

"Hello, Tony," said Martin rudely. "I thought I'd find you here. Come to see that nobody bites your wonderful Pierre before he's safe away from us, I suppose?"

"Father!" cried Ann in a tone of indignant protest.

The old actor, with an embarrassed laugh, made no reply but sat with the manuscript open on his knee. His attitude and manner were ex-

actly those of a prompter listening to a play.

Martin, paying no attention to his daughter's cry, continued addressing Old Tony. "You mark my word, Tony Latour, the day will come when you'll be mighty sorry for the way you've encouraged that fool boy of Harriet Noël's in his crazy ideas about bein' an actor. Look at what happened to Harriet! Look at yourself! If the poor boy's mother'd had good sense she'd never a named you executor of her will and guardian of her boy. But Harriet Noël—"

When Martin spoke the name of Pierre's mother, Old Tony looked up from his manuscript with a quick indignant motion of his head. Then, as Ann's father continued, the old actor closed the manuscript and putting it on the floor beside his chair, rose to his feet and with theatrical gesture and voice cried, "Stop!"

Martin, silenced by the old actor's voice and manner, stood staring at him. Ann, too, was speechless.

As if he were speaking lines in a play, Old Tony continued: "You have said quite enough, Martin Bevis. Please confine your criticisms to me. I have become so accustomed to the yapping of our Orchard Hill poodles, and the squalling of our

village cats that I am no longer disturbed by your noise."

Martin, cowed by the dignity of the old actor, but stung by his words, could only mumble a schoolboy's retort, "Huh! You think you're somebody, don't you?"

"I know I am," returned the old actor proudly. "And I advise you, sir, to discuss things which come within the limits of your intelligence—the pennies and dimes which have kept your nose so close to your bookkeeping in the First National Bank for the last forty years, for instance, or your two-bit church affairs, or your picayune village politics."

At this Ann suddenly asserted herself. "Stop it, both of you! I won't have you quarreling like this in my house. The idea! You two have been friends since your school days and you are squabbling like a couple of naughty boys. For two pins, I'd give you both a good spanking!"

Old Tony relaxed from his theatrical pose and Martin turned away mumbling.

Ann continued: "You have no right to talk to Father Tony like this, Pa—you know how he loves Pierre."

Martin faced his daughter, "I'm fond of Pierre,

too, Ann—we all are—but you don't seem to appreciate the situation. Your husband, Bruce Carey, he is the boy with the brains. He is no impractical, irresponsible dreamer wanting to be a great play actor. If he had been, would you ever have married him? I'll say you wouldn't. I'm not saying that Pierre ain't a *good* boy. But Bruce is a natural born financier. You'll see him one of the big guns on Wall Street some day—if you'll only encourage him a little. Right now he's too big for a small-town bank like the Orchard Hill First National. And what has Pierre ever done? Soda fountain jerk in the Owl Drug Store! That's the limit of his business ability. You can see how far he's likely to get with this money his mother has left him. If Pierre would let Bruce have his money to invest in this Red Butte, Nevada, gold mining proposition, Bruce would make a fortune for Pierre and himself and you. That's the way fortunes are made. Pierre will just be throwing his money away, givin' it to that New York school for teachin' him how to act on the stage. I know how to make money all right, but I ain't never had a chance. Every opportunity I ever had to make some real money your ma interfered."

"You mean, Pa, that mother kept you from handing your money over to any get-rich-quick artist that you happened to meet."

"I guess I know a good investment when it's presented to me. I could tell you of a dozen big money-making propositions that your ma kept me out of. And you're just like her—always raising a howl whenever I've had a chance to get in on the ground floor of a good thing. And look at me now—stuck in a dinky small-town bank, bookkeeping for forty years! I've got to go back down to the bank and work to-night because my balance is off thirty-nine cents. Thirty-nine cents! That's the sort of a financier I am!"

As the old bookkeeper concluded, his voice and manner were so utterly hopeless that both Ann and Old Tony were touched.

"Never you mind, Pa," the young woman said as one might comfort a disappointed child. "You have not made a million dollars but you have been a wonderful father and there's not a man in Orchard Hill that's more highly thought of inside the church and out."

"That's true, Martin," said Old Tony in the same vein, "and you have raised a daughter that is worth more than all the gold that was ever

mined. I'm sorry that I spoke so unkindly. Forgive me."

"That's all right, Tony," returned Martin heartily, "I guess I was a little brash myself. Forget it, will you? You see, this Nevada gold mine proposition is a chance in a lifetime for Bruce. By crips! It makes me wild when I think about him not havin' the money to take advantage of it! I don't want Ann's husband to turn out the same kind of a failure I am."

"It's these chances of a lifetime that always fail, Pa," said Ann.

"Who is this Nevada mine promoter who is offering Bruce such a golden opportunity?" asked Old Tony.

"He's a mining man in Red Butte," Martin answered. "Bruce knows him. If the proposition wasn't all right Bruce would be the last man in the world to want to go into it. Bruce knows what's what, Bruce does."

Ann spoke thoughtfully, "I tremble sometimes to think what Bruce's determination to be rich may lead him into. He's so mad for money that it frightens me."

"You don't need to worry," Martin returned. "Bruce is too smart to be anything but honest.

He is big, I tell you, big. He's just naturally too big for Orchard Hill. Folks are beginning to see it, too. He'll be one of our leading financiers some day—you'll see."

"Pierre is a great artist soul, Martin," Old Tony said earnestly. "The ability to make money is not the only mark of a man's worth."

"Oh, sure," returned Martin, "I know money ain't everything. But it wouldn't hurt Pierre's soul none if he was to help Bruce to get a start. 'Tain't like we was wantin' him to *give* his money to Bruce. If he'd only let Bruce use it for a year, Bruce would make more for Pierre than Pierre can make in a hundred years actin' on the stage. If you was a dutiful wife, Ann, and interested in your husband's future, like you ought to be, you'd persuade Pierre to help Bruce."

"Now, Pa—" said Ann. She was interrupted by the sound of the front door being closed by a vigorous hand, and Bruce Carey appeared in the archway leading into the hall.

It was evident from the bank clerk's manner that he had important business on his mind. Before entering the room he removed his coat and hat and hung them over the stair rail close to the newel, calling out as he did so: "Supper about

ready, Ann? I've got to go to Camden to-night —seven-forty train. Get a move on, will you?"

Ann sprang to her feet. "My goodness, I forgot all about supper! But you have plenty of time, Bruce. There's no need for such a rush."

"Much you know about it," Bruce retorted as he entered the living room. "Isn't Pierre planning to leave on the six-fifteen train in the morning?"

"Yes," said Ann.

"Yes," returned Bruce, "and I can't get a train back here before eight o'clock. If I talk any business with Pierre I've got to do it before my train leaves for Camden to-night—see? And, believe me, I'm going to talk business with that would-be actor, too."

Ann, making no reply, went into the kitchen and began preparing supper.

Old Tony said, "How do you do, Bruce?"

Bruce answered the old actor's courteous greeting with a cool stare and a gruff, "Hello," then pointedly turning his back he said to Martin, "You'd know that our doddering old boss would pick this evening to send me to Camden with some papers for Fuller, the president of the Farmers'

National there, wouldn't you? Being nothing but a cheap clerk in his damned old two-by-four bank, I'm the one who has to run his dinky errands any old time it suits *him.*"

"It's some business that has to be in Fuller's hands when the Farmers' National opens in the morning, I suppose," returned Martin. "There is no train to Camden before noon, you know, so it has to go to-night."

"Yeah," Bruce replied, "but what about *my* business? The Orchard Hill First National doesn't own *me* body and soul like it does *you.* Not yet! Outside of banking hours my time is supposed to be my own."

He turned and for a moment stood silently staring with studied insolence at Old Tony. Then, as Ann began setting the table for supper he whirled about and demanded imperiously: "Where is Pierre?"

Ann went to the foot of the stairs and called: "Pierre, oh, Pierre!"

Pierre's cheerful voice answered, "Whoo-hoo —what's the matter, Ann?"

"Come on down, Pierre—Father Tony is here, and supper is about ready."

"Comin'," shouted Pierre, and the next minute

he appeared running joyously down the stairs and into the living room.

The young man was radiant with happiness; the day toward which he had looked from his early boyhood had at last arrived He was about to begin—was actually beginning—his life work. From now on he was free to devote himself wholly to the art he loved.

"Hello, everybody," he called gaily. "How's the bookkeeping, Pa Bevis? Every little old balance balancing as it should? Every figure right up on its toes, as it were?"

Martin, Ann and Old Tony laughed, but Bruce turned away in disgust.

"All but thirty-nine cents, Pierre," said Martin.

"Too bad, too bad—naughty little thirty-nine cents," Pierre returned in the manner of a fond parent chiding a small wayward child. Then burlesquing a man of big business, he addressed Bruce with an air of ponderous importance. "Ahem! And what is your opinion of the Wall Street situation to-day, Mr. Carey? Is the market going up or is it going down? Are you contemplating another merger or corner—or what have you?"

Again the three laughed. But Bruce said in a

tone of disgust, "Aw, cut the comedy, will you? You're not so damned funny."

Pierre bowed, burlesquing an obsequious court jester, and in the voice and manner of a grandiloquent Shakespearian actor, replied: "I pray thee pardon thy poor fool, sire, an my antics fail to please Your Majesty, I'll trade cap and bells for an interest table, cut no more capers but clip coupons, though methinks to make a money juggler of a mountebank were but a sorry jest."

Martin, Ann and Old Tony laughed again. But Bruce cried angrily, "For Pete's sake lay off, will you?" Then to Ann, "Come on, Ann, why don't we eat?" He seated himself at the table.

Ann went into the kitchen and brought dishes of food for the table while Pierre, going to Old Tony, said heartily in his own gracious manner, "I'm awfully glad you came over this afternoon, Father Tony. I'm going to miss you like the devil, but I'll be thinking of you all the time, and thanking you for all you've been to me." He threw his arm affectionately around the old actor's shoulders.

Ann, with a dish in her hand, paused to gaze

at them sympathetically. Martin, too, watched them with interest.

"Well," barked Bruce impatiently, "are you folks coming to supper or not?"

Martin hurriedly drew a chair up to the table and seated himself.

Ann looked at her husband and father with anger and shame. "Bruce!" she exclaimed in an undertone, "how can you be so rude?" She turned and said heartily, "Come, Father Tony, you'll have supper with us, of course."

Pierre echoed the invitation gaily: "That's the stuff! Come on, we'll make it a farewell banquet to speed the departing hero on his way to conquer the hosts of Broadway theater managers."

The old actor hesitated, looking wistfully from face to face, but Bruce and Martin were uncompromisingly inhospitable and the old gentleman said, "I'm sorry, Ann—I'd like to, but I—I'd better not stay this evening." To Pierre he added anxiously: "You are really going in the morning, Pierre?"

Pierre patted him on the back reassuringly, "Sure as the sunrise, Father Tony."

Pierre had not failed to observe the inhospitable attitude of Bruce and Martin, but gave no sign that anything but the most cordial feeling toward his old friend existed.

"Sure you can't stay for supper?" asked Ann.

Again the old actor looked at the two men seated at the table: "No, dear—thank you—some other time, perhaps."

Ann gave him his hat and Pierre went with him into the hall.

In the archway, the old actor turned and with fine dignity said: "Good evening, Ann, good evening, Bruce, Martin."

Bruce and Martin returned gruffly: "Good-by."

"Come again soon," Ann cried heartily.

Without a word to her husband or father, Ann finished putting supper on the table and seated herself.

Pierre reëntered gaily and taking his seat at the table looked questioningly from the painfully silent Ann to Bruce and Martin, who were regarding their plates with studied concentration. It was very evident that the peace and harmony of the little family was, to say the least, strained. But Pierre's spirits were too high

to be subdued by the ill-nature of others and, partially for that reason, partially from a feeling of sympathy for Ann, he exerted himself to relieve the tension.

"Ah hah!" he cried melodramatically, "biscuits! Hot biscuits, as I live! By all the gods I swear, my Lady Ann, that I do weep great weeps of woe when overtaken by the most dreadful thought that in the benighted land to which I go there will be no skill like to thine to conjure up such cookery! Woe, woe is me! How shall I, in New York, live without my Lady Ann's hot biscuits?"

"My God!" groaned Bruce.

Ann and Martin laughed.

"Better change your mind about being an actor," said Martin. "Tendin' soda fountain ain't such a high-minded job, maybe, but soda jerks eat regular, which is more than most actors do from what I've read about 'em."

"Soda jerk!" cried Pierre. "Spare me, good sir, 'tis a part I do not crave to play." More seriously he continued: "But the rôle has advantages, friends—it has advantages. My time at the soda fountain has not been wasted. An actor, you know, must play many parts. By the

way, you should see my well-meaning successor serve the customers!"

Pushing his chair back from the table he rose to his feet and in the manner of a showman announced: "With your kind permission, ladies and gentlemen, I will first present the master artist of the soft drink fraternity."

Throwing his napkin over his arm with a magnificent gesture he approached Ann. Bowing with easy grace he ostentatiously removed the dishes, carefully wiped the table and set a glass of water before her. Then bending over her and offering an imaginary menu, with exaggerated solicitation he murmured: "Does madam desire to order something, please?"

"I'll have a malted milk chocolate, with egg," laughed Ann.

With another bow, the waiter said, "Yes, madam. I thank you, madam," and going to an imaginary soda fountain he proceeded with many a fantastic flourish to mix the imaginary drink which he then, with an elegant gesture, placed before the lady. Then turning to Bruce and Martin, with a bow, he asked: "And what would the gentlemen like, please? I have sweets for the sweet, pickles for the pickled, crackers

for the cracked, and nuts for the nuts. I have lemon sours for sour souls, frozen custards for frosty cusses, iced fruits for frozen faces, and sundaes for every day in the week."

"Aw, cut it out!" shouted Bruce. "You act like a darned half-wit."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," returned the bowing waiter.

In the character of a showman he announced: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, if you please, observe the wretched amateur."

Again he approached Ann—this time acting the part of an inexperienced, awkward, gum-chewing lout of a waiter, wiping the perspiration from his face with his napkin, spilling the water from the glass and making every sort of an error in his bungling attempt to mix and serve a soda fountain drink.

By this time, Ann and Martin were heartily enjoying the exhibition of this village soda jerk's ability as an actor, and even Bruce was becoming interested. Following the applause, in which Bruce joined in a half-hearted way, Pierre presented various well-known Orchard Hill characters as they patronized the imaginary soda fountain, announcing each character in turn.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to present 'a small-town sport.' "

When the characterization was finished Martin, slapping Bruce on the back, shouted, "Jimmie Hughes, to the life!"

"Our village sweetheart," announced the master of ceremonies, and the giggling, flirting, self-conscious high school girl was named by Ann: "Gertie Fellows."

"A tough kid," was announced and when presented, named by Martin: "Billie Norton."

"A dame in the social swim" was named by Ann and Martin in the same breath: "Mrs. Cameron."

"Orchard Hill's old soak," brought a shout from Bruce: "Jack Godfrey!" And the audience of three applauded vigorously.

Pierre bowed his thanks and as they rose from the table, Bruce said heartily: "I've got to hand it to you, kid, when it comes to acting." Then, as he went to the door leading to his bedroom, he added: "Don't go away. I'll be back in a minute—I want to see you."

Martin went into his bedroom, and Pierre and Ann were alone.

Ann stood gazing at the young man with more

adoration in her face and manner than she realized. "Oh, Pierre," she said slowly, "must you go away to that school? I don't see why you have to study acting. I mean, why don't you go on the stage right now? I have never seen an actor who could compare with you!"

Pierre laughed boyishly, pleased with the compliment, but remembering that Ann had never seen a really great play and knew nothing at all of the art of acting.

"Don't kid me, Ann," he returned seriously, "I have a long, long way to go before I can even think of attempting a part in a real play. Perhaps I'll make it some day—perhaps not."

Ann cried indignantly, "I'm not kidding, Pierre."

Pierre continued as if she had not spoken: "I know I have something because Father Tony says I have, and because mother used to say that some day I would be a real artist. But I guess everybody knows how mothers are that way."

"But, Pierre, surely Father Tony knows—he was an actor himself. And your mother knew because she was an actress. Father Tony says she was the most wonderful actress he ever saw."

Pierre smiled at her fondly. Her womanly

reasons for her faith in him were so characteristic.

"You know, Ann," he said gravely, "when I was a little tad, I was with mother on the stage."

"Yes," said Ann, "I know."

Pierre continued: "I did kiddie parts and mother used to watch me from the wings and when I would make my exit I would run off the stage straight into her arms, and she would hold me tight and kiss me, and whisper, 'Bravo, bravo! my little Pierre!' " Dropping on one knee he held out his arms and acted the part of the mother receiving her little son as he ran to her, repeating with a voice of mother love: "Bravo, bravo! my little Pierre!"

Rising to his feet and resuming his natural tone he continued: "And mother used to say, Ann, that the most important thing in any part is the actor's exit. A lot of people hold that an actor's entrance is all important, just as some folks are always bragging about their families and ancestors and being well-born and all that—it's the same idea. But it's not your entrance, it's your exit that really counts. It's the actor's exit lines—the way he builds up his part to the very finish—the way he leaves the stage that

rounds out the part and establishes the character.

"Take Jesus, for example," he continued reverently, "Jesus didn't make much of an entrance on the stage—most unpretentious and ordinary commonplace entrance anybody could possibly make: Born in a manger, in an old cow shed. But look at His exit! It was Jesus' exit that impressed His divine character upon the whole world for all time and all eternity." The young man paused a moment, standing in silent meditation, then with agonized face uplifted and arms extended as on a cross he acted the crucifixion. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His head fell forward, his body, relaxed, seemed to hang from the arms which were still extended on the imaginary cross. For a long moment he held the pose while Ann, under the spell of his acting, unconsciously assumed the attitude of a worshiper.

Then Pierre said: "I'm going to tell you something, Ann, something that I wouldn't dare say to Bruce or your father or any one but Father Tony and you. Just before mother died she talked to me about her 'exit,' as she called it. She made me feel that death was no more than stepping off the stage into the wings after you

had finished playing your bit. And she said that when she had made her exit she would stand in the wings and watch me as I played my part—just as she used to do, you know, and that she would be standing there in the wings to receive me when my cue came and I made my exit. I know it would sound foolish to a lot of people, Ann, but that's why I've got to go to school and study to make myself the kind of an actor that mother wants me to be. I feel deep down inside me that I was born to be an actor and I must play the part that is written for me. I must act the rôle in which I have been cast. I must read my lines as the Author of life gave them to me. That's why I can't give up my school money to Bruce or to any one else—not if I knew it would bring me millions. You do understand, don't you, Ann? It seems to me I can feel mother standing there in the wings watching me, and I want to play my part so that when I make my exit she will say, 'Bravo! bravo! my little Pierre.' "

Ann impulsively moved closer to him and, putting her hands on his shoulders, said: "I do understand, Pierre dear—oh, I *do* understand! Of course you must be true to yourself; you could

not be anything else, my Pierre. No matter what Bruce or my father says you must not think of letting Bruce have a single penny of your school money for his gold mining scheme. You won't, will you, dear—it would be wicked."

Neither Pierre nor Ann noticed that Bruce was standing in the doorway to his room watching them and listening to her words.

"A very pretty scene," Bruce exclaimed. He was angry but controlled himself to a degree because at this particular moment he did not wish to antagonize Pierre.

Pierre and Ann drew apart and as they turned to face him they were a little confused; not so much from any feeling of guilt, but more because of Bruce's tone and manner.

"Too bad there's no movie camera handy," Bruce continued, coming slowly forward. "Just the sort of gooey stuff movies deal in: Other man's wife bidding lover a fond farewell, heh?" He laughed.

The embarrassed Pierre protested, "Aw, Bruce, what's the matter with you—don't be foolish. Ann and I were only just—"

Bruce interrupted him. "Sure, you were only just—I could see that for myself. Honestly, I

don't know how my wife is ever going to manage without her little playmate. And who, oh who, will mother poor Pierre, and advise him about his soul, and understand him, and appreciate him when he is far away from his beloved Ann?"

Ann, without speaking, was watching her husband doubtfully. Pierre attempted to hide his embarrassment by burlesquing the exit of a frightened lover caught by the husband of his mistress. As he reached the archway opening into the hall Bruce called: "What's your hurry, Pierre? Don't go on my account—I did not mean to butt in on your tender scene; it was very effective, really."

Pierre whirled and ran hastily up the stairs.

Bruce's laughter alarmed Ann. "Bruce," she exclaimed, "what in the world is the matter with you?"

"There's not a damned thing the matter with *me,*" he returned grimly, "but I have something to say to *you,* my lady, and I'm going to say it straight."

"Yes," retorted Ann coldly. "It must be something very important, judging from your tone."

"It is. I overheard what you said to Pierre

just now about his letting me invest his money for him."

Ann drew herself up defiantly. "Well, what of it? You have known all along what I think about your trying to get Pierre's school money away from him. You and father ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

Bruce controlled himself with an effort. "Listen, Ann, I've told you over and over that this Red Butte, Nevada, gold mining proposition is my big chance to make a killing and get out of this dinky small-town banking game which will never get me anywhere in a thousand years."

Ann retorted hotly, "And I've told you over and over that you have no right to ask Pierre to let you risk his school money in a business about which you know less than nothing."

"But I *do* know all about this Red Butte mine."

Ann's only answer was a gesture of hopeless resignation signifying that it was useless to continue such a fruitless argument.

Bruce moved uneasily about, considering whether or not he should tell his wife something which he had so far kept from her. Then apparently reaching a decision he said, "Ann,

if I tell you how I know this Nevada mining proposition is all right will you promise me that you won't tell Pierre?"

Ann was surprised. "Not tell Pierre?"

"Yes—do you promise not to repeat what I say to Pierre?"

She considered a moment, then: "Why, yes, Bruce, of course I promise not to tell anybody anything which you ask me not to mention. Don't you know you can trust me?"

"Well then," said Bruce, "I know all about this Nevada gold mine because it is Roy Donovan who told me about it and wants me to go in with him. Donovan knows the mining game from the ground up. He was born and raised in the West up to the time he went into the theatrical business. And when he quit Pierre's mother and the theater he went back west again into mining."

Ann drew back in amazement. "Bruce! Are you talking about Roy Donovan, Pierre's father?"

"Yes."

"Well, no wonder you don't want Pierre to know who is back of your precious mining scheme. A fine chance you'd have to ever get a penny of Pierre's money for it after the way his father

treated his mother when he was a child. Shame on you, Bruce Carey!"

"Now you look here, Ann, it's true enough that Donovan left Pierre and his mother flat and has never been heard of by them since, but you want to remember there are two sides to every story. Roy Donovan was always mighty good to me. Don't forget that he was my stepfather and that even after my mother died he continued to take care of me as if I were his own son."

Ann returned indignantly: "And don't you forget, Bruce Carey, that when Roy Donovan married Harriet Noël she mothered you as if you were her own boy, and that even after her own son, Pierre, was born she continued to treat you exactly as if you and Pierre were brothers. You talk about this man Donovan being like a father to you! You owe a thousand times more to Pierre's mother! I know because Father Tony Latour has told me all about it."

"Leave that old fool, Tony, out of this, will you?" growled Bruce. "If it hadn't been for him and you I'd have had Pierre lined up and this deal cinched long ago."

"Do you mean to tell me, Bruce, that all these years that you have been growing up here in

Orchard Hill you have known where Roy Donovan was; that he has been keeping in touch with you?"

"No, I never heard from him after he quit the theater and I came to live in Orchard Hill, until he wrote me about this mine."

Ann returned thoughtfully: "I see—your precious stepfather evidently knows about this money which Pierre received from his mother's will on his twentieth birthday, and figures that he can get hold of it through you. I'm sorry I promised you I wouldn't tell Pierre."

"I suppose you wouldn't believe that Roy Donovan really wants to do something big for his own son, Pierre, and for me?"

"No, Bruce, I couldn't believe *that.*"

"And you still refuse to help me persuade Pierre to let me invest his money for him?"

"I certainly do, Bruce—more than ever, after what you have told me. Are you so crazy for money that you have lost all sense of what is honorable and decent? I simply can't understand you."

"All right. Now listen to what I've got to say. No man can do big things without his wife's help. You have no ambition either for

yourself or for me. You would be content to have me a bank clerk here in Orchard Hill the rest of my life, just like your mother and you kept your father down all his life. You would saddle me with a raft of kids before we could even afford an automobile! It may be all right for you—you have never known anything but this damned hick town, but I wasn't born here and I don't intend to spend my life here. I've had just about all I can stand of Pierre and his wonderful genius, and his career, and his dead mother's influence, and your sentimental mooning over him. Pierre loves you. He loved you before I married you. But he gave you up for his art just as his mother before him gave up Antonio Latour. Pierre would do anything you asked him, and if I lose this chance to make a stake it'll be all your fault. You can take your choice; persuade Pierre to let me use his money, or I'll cut the whole works and strike out for myself. If you won't play with me I'll play a lone hand."

"Bruce, Bruce, you're crazy! You wouldn't —you couldn't—"

Bruce continued relentlessly: "It's not like I was trying to steal Pierre's money. I'm propos-

ing merely to invest it in such a way that it'll make big returns for him and put me on my feet at the same time."

"But Pierre's plans! His education for the stage! His career!"

"Oh, rot! I tell you I only need this money for a year! But there's my proposition—take your choice!"

Ann's reply was prevented by Pierre who appeared running down the stairs.

Upon entering the room, Pierre could not help seeing that there was trouble between the husband and wife. Bruce, hard, cold, calculating, looked from Ann to Pierre and from Pierre back to Ann. Ann, trying to hide her tears, could not speak. Pierre, embarrassed, uneasy—fearing that he might be the cause of their quarrel—looked from one to the other in boyish uncertainty.

Then, pointedly ignoring the situation, Pierre approached Bruce. "Here's a little good-by present for you, old man," he said, extending his hand with a jeweler's box.

Bruce silently took the box and opening it found a scarf pin.

"Thanks, Pierre."

"Thought you'd like it," returned Pierre joy-

ously. "Had to give it to you now, 'cause I'll be leaving in the morning before you get back from Camden."

Ann said hurriedly, with an effort to control her voice, "That reminds me, I must go and pack Bruce's bag." Still crying she left the room.

Pierre and Bruce stood looking after her. Slowly Pierre turned to Bruce. "What's the trouble, Bruce—what's Ann crying about?"

Bruce did not answer but moved about uneasily. Once he stopped before Pierre and for a long moment, without speaking, regarded him thoughtfully. Then he resumed his restless movements about the room.

Pierre grew more and more disturbed. "What's the matter with you and Ann, Bruce? Can't you tell me what it's all about?"

Again Bruce paused before Pierre and regarded him doubtfully. At last he said slowly: "I'm not so sure that I ought to tell you, Pierre."

"Why not? Is Ann crying because of anything I've said or done?"

Bruce answered reluctantly: "In a way—yes."

"What do you mean, 'In a way'?"

"Well, if you must know, Ann is feeling badly

over my proposition to invest your money for you."

"But what is there about that for her to cry over?"

"Oh nothing, perhaps, but you know how women are."

"But, Bruce, Ann knows that I'm going to use the money mother left for my education exactly as she meant for me to use it. I told Ann not a half hour ago that I wouldn't let you nor any one else have that money to invest in anything. I'm going to use it as mother expected me to use it. That's all settled."

"I know it is, Pierre, but—"

"But what?"

"Well—look here, Pierre, Ann's been mighty good to you since you have been making your home with us, hasn't she?"

"She's been wonderful, Bruce. I have often wished I could make you both understand how grateful I am."

"Yeah? Well—"

"Well?"

"It would mean a lot to Ann if I could get a start toward making some real money."

"Yes, of course."

"Pierre, I want you to know that if I have been a bit too keen urging you to help me take advantage of this opportunity to get in right on a really big thing, and at the same time more than double your money for you, it's been on Ann's account. I don't mind for myself, pinching along like we have to on my measly bank-clerk salary —I'm used to roughing it. But it hurts like hell to see Ann slaving the way she does without even a woman to wash and iron for her. I don't want Ann to work herself to death like so many of these Orchard Hill women do. If she didn't love books and pictures and music and beautiful things like she does, or if she wasn't the kind of a woman who could really appreciate such things it wouldn't matter so much—but you know how fine Ann is."

Pierre nodded—too deeply moved by this new view of the situation to speak.

Bruce, observing the effect of his words continued: "I'd like for Ann to have the home she dreams about and all that a woman like her deserves. And—well—she's counted too much, I guess, on what this Nevada gold mine was going to do for her. We can't blame her if she is a bit upset over her disappointment. You see there's

not one chance in a hundred that such an opportunity will ever come to us again."

"But, Bruce," cried Pierre desperately, "Ann has been urging me all along not to let you have my money. She wants me to go to school. She wants me to study—to prepare myself to be an actor as I have always planned—as mother planned for me before she died."

"Sure, I know. That's Ann—that's the kind of woman she is. She would make any sacrifice for you, Pierre. But just the same she feels it—feels it all the more because she is so fond of you. I know I oughtn't to have told you, but that's what she's crying about."

"Ann crying because I am going way to school!"

"Not exactly. She's crying because after all she's done for you and all she's been to you, you haven't seen your way to help me get the start in life that would mean so much to her. She thought you cared more for her—for us—that's all."

"Good Lord! Bruce, I never thought of it *that* way!"

"That's what I've tried to tell Ann, Pierre.

I told her you didn't realize what it would mean to her."

"That's right—I—I haven't realized what it would mean to Ann."

"I know you haven't, old man, and she knows it too, but it hurts just the same."

"But I'm all packed and ready to go in the morning!"

"You haven't bought your ticket yet."

"That's so. I suppose I could have my old soda fountain back. That fellow who has my place now won't last many days—I can see that."

"And you would go right on making your home with Ann and me as you have been doing. It isn't as if you were giving up your plans to go on the stage, Pierre, it's only putting it off a few months."

"Sure, I know. A year really wouldn't make so much difference. Are you dead certain, Bruce, that this gold mining investment is all that you say it is, and that you won't need my money longer than a year?"

"If I wasn't sure do you think for a minute that I would propose your letting me invest your money in it? I might risk my own money but

I certainly wouldn't take any chances with yours, Pierre."

"But I haven't so very much money, Bruce. I figure that there's barely enough with what I've saved for me to scrape through school and live until I can land some sort of a part in some play."

"I know what you have, Pierre. I looked up your account in our bank. You drew it all out this afternoon, too."

As if he were moving in a dream, Pierre slowly drew a package of bills from his pocket and gave it to Bruce. "I—I never realized about Ann," he said.

Bruce, as he put the money in his pocket, said: "She would give me the devil if she knew I'd told you. You'll never regret this, Pierre; it will make us all rich."

"Yeah," returned Pierre, "I'm awfully glad I can do something for Ann."

Before they could say anything more Martin Bevis entered with hat and cane. "That Camden train goes at seven-thirty, doesn't it, Bruce?"

"Seven-forty," answered Bruce.

"Oh! Well, we can walk as far as the bank

together. I've got to find that blasted thirty-nine cents yet to-night."

Ann, coming in with the bag which she had packed for Bruce, asked, "What time is it now, Pa? That old clock never is right. I wish we could afford a new one."

As Martin drew his watch from his pocket, a massive old-fashioned Masonic charm came loose from the guard and fell to the floor. Martin cried: "I've dropped my Masonic charm," and began hunting about the floor and under the furniture. Ann and Pierre went to Martin's assistance. Bruce moved quickly to the desk at the farther end of the room and began hurriedly to write a letter.

"Here it is!" cried Ann, recovering the charm and giving it to her father.

The old bookkeeper handled the emblem fondly. "I wouldn't take a fortune for that," he said proudly. He handed it to Pierre. "Look what is engraved on the back."

Pierre examining the charm read: "Presented to Martin Bevis by his brother Masons in token of his services as Worshipful Master of the Orchard Hill Lodge, number thirty-six, November thirtieth, eighteen hundred ninety-three."

"Fine!" said Pierre, "I don't wonder you think a lot of it."

"Yes, sir, any man would have a right to be proud of that," Martin returned receiving the charm from Pierre's hand and regarding it with fond admiration. Then, looking at it more closely and examining his watch chain, he remarked: "The spring in this blamed snap is weak. That's how it come loose."

"Hadn't you better leave it at home, Pa, until you have it fixed?" asked Ann.

"No, no," Martin returned impatiently, as he fixed the snap. "I have never been without this sacred emblem a minute since it was presented to me. I'll just bend this spring a bit and it will hold all right until I get a new one." As he restored the charm to its place on his watch guard he added laughingly, "I never would find that thirty-nine cents to balance my books to-night if I was to leave my lucky charm at home." He looked at his watch and called to Bruce, "Come on, Bruce, it's time we were going if you expect to catch that train to Camden to-night!"

Bruce finished the letter he was writing and as he rose from the desk and came forward, placed

it in an envelope which he sealed and put in his pocket.

"Good-by, Ann—" he kissed her hurriedly.

"Good-by, dear, you'll be sure to come home on the morning train, won't you?"

He laughed nervously as if he were excited and, turning hastily, offered his hand to Pierre. "Well, good-by, old scout."

Pierre, shocked and wondering at Bruce's manner and the indifference of his farewell, shook hands silently.

Bruce, with a laugh, caught up his bag and rushed away after Martin who was already in the hall.

As her husband disappeared through the archway, Ann called after him: "I'll expect you on the morning train."

Suddenly Pierre grasped the full import of the situation—Bruce was going away with his school money—his own plans to leave for New York in the morning were wrecked. Starting as if to run after Bruce, he called with quick excitement: "Bruce, oh, Bruce—wait a minute, I—"

The front door slammed shut. Pierre stood as if stunned.

Ann was bewildered and hurt by Bruce's man-

ner but she attributed it to their quarrel and his anger against her because she had refused to help him in his plans to use Pierre's money. Pierre's manner also disturbed her but she thought that he was merely hurt by the lack of feeling in Bruce's farewell to him. Hiding her own emotions, she sought to comfort Pierre. "Don't mind, dear, Bruce simply forgot that you would be gone before he can get home in the morning."

"You think *that* is it, do you?" Pierre asked doubtfully.

Ann looked at him questioningly. "Why, of course. He will feel terribly when he remembers; I know him so well."

"I wonder if you do!"

Ann, with increasing uneasiness, tried to arouse Pierre from his mood. "Oh, come now, Pierre, you know that Bruce is very fond of you. He'll miss you something awful when you are gone, as we all will. He is not very demonstrative, that is all—it's only his way."

"I wonder!" said Pierre again.

"I expect you'll be too busy ever to get homesick for us," said Ann, determined to lead his mind away from the painful incident. "But you

will find time to *think* of us, won't you? You won't forget us altogether, will you? And you'll try to write to us once in a while?"

Pierre did not answer but only stood looking at her. He was trying to find words to tell her what had happened, wondering what she would say when she knew, and trying to make himself believe that everything was all right in spite of his terrible apprehension that everything was all wrong.

Ann, watching him, grew more and more troubled. "Pierre," she said at last, desperately, "Pierre, what *is* the matter? Why are you like this? Please tell me."

Aroused by her appeal, but unable yet to tell her that he had given his school money to Bruce, Pierre took refuge, as he so often did, in burlesque acting. In his best stage manner he declaimed: "My dearest Lady Ann, I most humbly beg your pardon. I was merely thinking what a wonderful thing it will be for you when your husband is a millionaire."

She laughed, greatly relieved to have Pierre assume his usual rôle. "Silly! You always frighten me nearly to death when you're so serious. You shouldn't ever think, if it makes you

so glum. But how do you know that Bruce is going to be a millionaire?"

With exaggerated melodramatic voice and gestures, he cried, "And is it not written in the book of destiny that your husband shall be rich and powerful among the kings of money and the lords of high finance? And you, my Lady Ann, you shall know the fulfillment of your dearest dreams. You shall dwell in a palace. You shall live amid luxuries. All the beautiful things so befitting to your grace and loveliness shall be yours. The world shall bow before you; the vulgar multitude shall kneel at your feet!"

Ann clapped her hands. Then more than half in earnest she said: "When your prophecy comes true, good sir, there's *one* thing I know I shall do."

Pierre instantly dropped the rôle of actor. "What is that, Ann?"

"I shall put on my most beautiful gown, with all my jewels and I shall sit in the most prominent box in a great theater and watch a famous actor named Pierre Donovan. And when all the people are applauding and the great artist is bowing and smiling, he will look up at me in my box and I shall throw him a kiss, like this—"

Pierre turned away quickly so Ann might not see his face and for a little they were both silent.

Then Ann said, in her practical way, "I do hope you will find some good motherly old soul in New York to look after your things, Pierre. I mean, to do your mending and all that. She must be a very nice old lady with white hair, you know. I don't think I would like having a young person looking after you. It's really scandalous the way you go on wearing your socks when they are full of holes. And you never think to get new underwear, or put your shirts in the laundry if some one doesn't remind you. And you simply must learn to pick up your things and not leave them scattered all over the house like you do at home. And, oh, Pierre, do please be careful with your money. You don't spend money foolishly, I know, but you are so careless with it, and any one can get every cent you have in your pocket if they ask you for it!"

Pierre, trying desperately to control his emotion, moved aimlessly about the room. Suddenly he noticed a package which the express man had left. Bringing it to the table, he asked curiously, "What's this?"

Ann, to cover her own feelings, and to distract

Pierre, answered playfully: "Don't you wish you knew?"

"Flowers?"

"I should say not! Who would send *me* flowers?"

"An exerciser, I bet," guessed Pierre. "One of those wiggling, jiggling contraptions to keep you from getting fat?"

Ann, laughing, shook her head.

Pierre, with customary burlesque acting, demanded sternly, "Madam, does your husband know about this?"

Ann answered triumphantly, "Bruce doesn't know a thing about it; no one knows but me. I've planned and schemed and saved for almost a year to get that!"

"Ah hah!" cried Pierre, "the treasure, the long lost jewels—precious loot from the sacred temple. But why risk bringing them here? The enemy is about us everywhere. We may even now be watched through the window! We are not safe a minute with this in the house! Come!" He seized the package and made as if to carry it off.

Ann, laughing, stopped him. "Here, you goose, let me show you."

She opened the package and disclosed one of those adjustable wire dress forms which are used by women who make their own dresses at home.

"My God!" exclaimed the horrified actor, "the body! The ghastly evidence of your crime! Hurry, woman, bring the pickax, the shovel, the quicklime!"

Ann set up the form. "See, this will help me fit my dresses. We can't afford a dressmaker, you know, so I make all my own clothes. I have saved out of my household money to buy it—pennies and nickels and dimes. Won't Bruce be surprised? It's adjustable, see?"

Pierre inspected the dress form critically, as one views a statue. "Gee, I never realized you looked like *that!*"

"Much you know what I look like," she retorted. "Here—stop your fooling and help me set it up."

She brought a tape measure and putting it in his hand said: "You must measure me."

Then, while he examined the tape wonderingly she removed the short-sleeved house apron she was wearing and stood before him in a low-necked sleeveless slip.

He stared at her stupidly.

"Well," she said, "begin—measure me—here are the instructions." She read from a printed tag which was attached to the form: "Neck, bust, arms, waist, hips—"

He drew back as if frightened and started to escape, but she caught him and dragged him back. "No, you don't! Come right back here and help me adjust this thing. Come on— Neck?"

Timidly, he measured her neck and announced the figures. Together they made the proper adjustments of the form, and again she stood before him. "Bust?" she commanded, and he obediently drew the tape measure around her.

As they proceeded, Ann grew more and more excited over the form and when they had finished the measurements she cried, "Isn't it great! Wait a minute, I'll show you!"

She ran into her room, while Pierre stood thoughtfully contemplating the form. Quickly she returned with a slip like the one she was wearing and placed the garment over the model.

Clapping her hands with delight she stood beside the form and cried: "Isn't it exactly like me?"

When the preoccupied Pierre did not answer

she again ran out of the room crying as she went, "I'll bring a dress, then you'll see!"

As if obeying some instinct stronger than his will, Pierre drew close to the dress form. The intimacies of the scene through which he had just passed; Ann's thoughtless freedom in admitting him into the privacies of her dress; the actual contact with her person; her tacit acceptance of the never-before-acknowledged closeness of their relationship; all had served to arouse in Pierre a love of which he had hitherto been conscious only as one might feel a beautiful, intangible and wholly impossible dream. The vague dream had suddenly become a terrible reality. His love had become a hunger for her—a need which frightened him by its intensity.

Timidly, reverently, he put out a hand to the dress form which from his measurements of Ann's person had been made an exact duplicate of her living body, and which was clothed in a garment which she had worn. Forgetful of all else, he touched the model with loving caresses as if Ann's garment covered not the wires and rods of a mechanical form but Ann's living self. He was thus engaged when Ann appeared with the dress, which she had gone to fetch, over her arm.

In the doorway she stopped short and stood amazed and frightened, but wondrously elated at what she saw. The very intimacies which had aroused Pierre had awakened her to the realities of her affection for him, and she, too, was overwhelmed by the flood of emotions which at this discovery of his love, swept over her.

Then Pierre knew that she was there.

As they faced each other, full realization came to them both. But in that same instant the fine spiritual endowments which Pierre had from his mother, the strength of character which had been given him through the beautiful companionship of that mother and son, the true greatness of soul which had been so wisely fostered in him by Antonio Latour—all the essential forces of his nature were aroused. As instinctively as he had drawn close to the dress form which, by the magic of the moment, was the body of Ann, he now moved to protect the love which in the madness of the moment they both had recognized. With his arm about the waist of the dress form he acted a ridiculous burlesque love scene which reached its climax when, with the dress form in his arms, he whirled about the room in a wild, grotesque dance.

Ann, appreciating fully the desperate purpose of his nonsense, took her cue from him and laughed gaily at the ridiculous scene. For a little she watched then withdrew to reappear a moment later dressed in her simple house dress.

Pierre ceased his grotesque antics and ostensibly wiped the perspiration from his brow, waiting apprehensively for her to speak.

"You just can't help making a play of everything you do, can you, Pierre? Father Tony is right—you were born to be an actor."

By the matter-of-fact tone in which she spoke, as well as by her words, Pierre knew that she would play her part in the tragedy of their love.

"Why not?" he said. "It's all a play anyway, isn't it? Haven't you ever heard Father Tony recite: 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'?"

"You will soon be acting in earnest, Pierre. How proud we will all be of you. I can just see Father Tony when you are really on the stage and the people who write about plays for the papers are saying wonderful things about you!"

In the high pitch of emotional excitement to which he had already been aroused, Ann's words

were almost more than he could endure. Beside himself with anguish, he shouted: "For God's sake let me alone. Don't talk about what I am going to do. I can't stand it, I tell you!" He dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Interpreting this as referring to their love she cried out: "Pierre!" and made as if to go to him. But on the very verge of sweeping everything aside with an open avowal of love she stopped. Again she cried: "Pierre!" then slowly she drew back. Quietly, sadly, she said, "I fear it is fortunate, Pierre, that you are going away in the morning."

"But that's just it," he shouted springing to his feet, "I am not going away in the morning! Do you understand? I am not going away to school at all."

"You are not going to school?" she faltered. "Why, Pierre! If you are not going to school as you have planned what are you going to do?"

"Stay here and be a soda jerk in the Owl Drug Store, I suppose."

Suddenly the significance of Bruce's manner when telling them good-by and the meaning of Pierre's disturbed state of mind, were clear to her.

She ran to Pierre and caught him by the arm. In her excitement she shook him as if he were a child. "Pierre—Pierre Donovan! I believe you gave your school money to Bruce! Tell me, did you? Did you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Pierre, Pierre, why, why did you do such a thing?"

Pierre, remembering all that Bruce had said about her hopes and disappointment, was too bewildered to speak.

"It was wicked," she said, "wicked! Oh, why did you do it?"

He stared at her stupidly.

"Why did you do it?" she said again.

Suddenly he understood how Bruce had tricked him by appealing to his love for Ann. He laughed.

Ann, frightened, cried, "Pierre, Pierre—don't —don't!"

With reckless passion, he shouted: "I did it so that we can all be rich. You want to be rich, don't you? Don't you want beautiful things—dresses and jewelry and automobiles? Don't you want to live in a fine house with servants and go to the theater and sit in a box and see great plays?

Of course you do. Bruce wants to be rich; he would commit a murder if it would bring him money enough. Your father wants to be rich. I want to be rich, too. To hell with art. I'm going to make money. Everybody wants to be rich, except old Father Tony, and everybody says he is a fool!"

"Pierre, stop it!" she cried. "You know you don't mean a word you are saying. I shall make Bruce return every penny of your money the moment he gets home to-morrow morning."

Pierre laughed: "Yes, you will! I can see Bruce Carey doing just that!" With bitter scorn of his own weakness he continued drearily: "All my life, I have done what Bruce wanted. The first thing I can remember was my father making me give up to Bruce. Everybody knows my father cared a lot more for his stepson than he did for me. My father hated me. Mother knew it. When Bruce and I were boys together I always did what he said. And now he's got my school money!" Suddenly he let himself go in a wild frenzy: "But, I tell you, I will go to school as I had planned; I'll go in spite of Bruce Carey and all his kind. I'll never go back to that damned soda fountain, so help me God! I'll get the

money I need if I have to steal it; I'll get it if I have to kill somebody!"

Ann was frightened; she had never realized that Pierre was capable of such passion. He had always been so calm and well poised.

"Pierre," she said gently, timidly, "please, dear, don't—don't lose control of yourself like this—you—"

But Pierre rushed from the room.

Ann called wildly: "Pierre! Pierre! Everything will be all right, Pierre!"

The front door slammed.

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE 2

WHEN Martin Bevis came home from the bank that evening it was apparent even to his indifferent powers of observation that his daughter was in a state of nervous excitement very unusual to her serene and well-poised nature. She had been trying to sew but when her father appeared in the archway between the hall and the living room she was on her feet, white and trembling, her sewing crushed in her hands, gazing with fearful eyes toward the hall as if she waited the coming of some dreadful apparition.

"Why, Ann! What's the matter, child—are you sick?"

She shook her head. "Pierre! Where is Pierre? Have you seen him?"

"I have been at the bank all the evening, working on my books."

"Oh, where *is* he? Why doesn't he come home?" she moaned, pacing the floor while Martin watched her in blank amazement.

"What in the world has happened, child?"

She did not answer but went to a window and tried to see out into the night.

"Is anything wrong with Pierre?"

She turned from the window and resumed her nervous movements about the room: "I've worried until I'm almost crazy."

"But what's the trouble? Can't you tell me what has happened?"

She whirled on him suddenly, with an outburst which startled him: "You know well enough what has happened. Bruce has taken Pierre's school money. It's the meanest, wickedest thing I ever heard of and you are just as bad as Bruce. You've both worked on that poor boy until now you've succeeded in ruining all his plans and driving him insane. Just because he is so generous, so anxious to make us happy; because he loves us so, you two beasts have hounded him into wrecking his own life as if *he* didn't matter at all. You've broken his heart—you've driven him mad —that's what you have done!"

"Nonsense!" said Martin sharply.

"Of course it's nonsense to you—everything but money is nonsense to people like you and Bruce. How could you two money worshipers

understand a great soul like Pierre Donovan? All you know is money, money, money! Pierre is not like common people; he is a genius; he is an artist. You and Bruce have taken from him something that means more to him than life itself. You have driven him nearly insane, I tell you. In the state of mind he is in now he is liable to do anything—kill himself or somebody else."

"Crazy!" cried Martin. "Bosh! The boy has done the most sensible thing he ever did in all his life. He may or may not be the artist you think he is, but there's one thing sure—when it comes to money or business, Pierre Donovan is just a natural-born darned fool. If ever anybody needed some honest, competent business man like Bruce to take care of his money for him, he does. I guess when the returns from that mine come rolling in, you and Pierre won't feel so bad about it."

A knock at the front door prevented Ann's reply. Martin looked at her expecting her to go to the door. She started but paused and turned back. "You go, Pa, I—I'm afraid."

Martin gazed at her stupidly. "Afraid of what?"

"Pierre—something has happened to him."

The knock came again. "Oh, why don't you go?" cried Ann, stamping her foot in an agony of suspense.

Martin went into the hall. Ann waited, wringing her hands in nervous apprehension.

Martin's voice was heard: "Hello, Tony, what the deuce brings you out this time of night?"

"Father Tony!" cried Ann, running to meet him. "Is it anything about Pierre? Where is he? Have you seen Pierre?"

"I—I was so worried I could not sleep," the old actor answered. "Hasn't Pierre come home yet?"

"No, no," moaned Ann.

"What were *you* worried about?" asked Martin.

"Really, Martin, I fear you will laugh at me, but I don't know exactly. I seemed to feel Harriet very near. I felt that her boy was in trouble. I couldn't sleep—I retire early, you know, so I got up thinking I would walk about in the fresh air. Then I—I saw him."

"Pierre?" cried Ann, "you saw Pierre, Father Tony?"

The old man nodded, unable for the moment to reply.

"Where was he—when did you see him, Tony?" asked Martin.

The old actor answered as if he himself doubted the truth of what he said: "Down town, near the bank—" he paused.

"Well, go on," said Martin.

"Yes, yes, Martin. I went to the drug store first. Then I thought I would come up here just to see if he was home and all right. I walked around the square and just as I turned around the corner into Elm Street I met him—right near the bank. I spoke to him; called him by name, and—he turned and *ran!* Really, I don't know what to think. Has anything happened, do you know?"

"Enough has happened," Ann answered. "Bruce has Pierre's school money."

"I was afraid of that," returned Old Tony. "I could see Bruce was going to make a last effort to persuade him." He turned on Martin with sudden fury: "And you, too, Martin Bevis—damn your wretched souls to hell! You and your precious son-in-law shall suffer for this! If there is a God in heaven, you filthy money-buzzards shall answer for what you have done to Harriet Noël's son."

They were too shocked by the old actor's vehemence to speak. Then Ann caught sight of Pierre in the hall. He had entered quietly and was on his way upstairs. "Pierre!" she cried wildly, "Pierre!"

The young man paused. Standing in the archway, he regarded them silently and his face was terrible to see.

Ann spoke timidly: "Won't you come in, Pierre; Father Tony is here!"

Pierre took a step into the room. Still he did not speak, but only looked at them.

Ann turned her face away to hide her tears.

Martin stared and drew back fearfully.

At last Pierre said harshly to Old Tony: "What are *you* doing here?"

The old actor answered gently: "I—I came to see you, Pierre."

"Well, you've seen me—now go on home."

"But, Pierre—"

"Go home," said Pierre. "I don't want to see you. I don't want to see anybody. I'm all right—you don't need to worry about me. I'm going to bed." But he made no move toward leaving the room—only stood there.

Old Tony turned appealingly to Ann.

"I would go to bed if I were you, dear," said Ann, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact way. "It must be quite late. Bruce will be back in the morning and I promise you everything will be all right then."

"That reminds me," said Martin in his bungling away, "Bruce gave me a letter for you, Ann —handed it to me just as he was leaving—forgot to give it to you himself, I guess."

Ann opened and read the letter. She gave a little cry and they saw her face white and horror-stricken.

Pierre started forward.

"Well, what's the matter now?" said Martin impatiently.

She made a ghastly effort to smile, and slowly shook her head. Methodically she replaced the letter in the envelope and put it in the pocket of her apron. Then, suddenly, her self-control vanished and she burst into tears.

Pierre ran to her. "Ann, Ann, what is it, dear?" When she could not answer he put his arm about her and tried to comfort her with low murmured words as one might soothe a crying child.

The two old men knew not what to say or do.

They could only gaze wonderingly at Ann and Pierre and at each other.

A loud knocking at the front door echoed through the house. They gave no heed. The imperative demand for admittance was repeated and this time, Ann, still crying, motioned her father to go to the door.

Martin went into the hall. Voices were heard and the old bookkeeper reappeared with four men.

For a long moment the men stood just inside the room looking at Ann, who was making a desperate effort to control her grief; at Pierre, who was supporting Ann; at Old Tony, who timidly withdrew into a far corner; and at Martin, who in great confusion was placing chairs for the unexpected visitors.

"Sit down, Mr. Dayton—Mr. Wilson—" the old bookkeeper was as excited and awkward as a schoolboy. "Sheriff Bolton, have a chair—Scott, sit over here."

The sheriff turned his gaze slowly from Ann and Pierre to one of his companions whose appearance marked him as a well-to-do business man—the most important personage in a small town's financial circle—one would say. "From

the looks of things, Mr. Dayton, I guess they know why we are here."

The sheriff's heavy voice was followed by a dead silence.

Martin's quavering tones broke the stillness: "We are very proud to have a visit from the president of the First National," he bowed toward Mr. Dayton, "and from Mr. Wilson, our teller at the bank," he ducked his head toward Mr. Wilson, "and from you, Sheriff, and Officer Scott—but I—really—I—"

The sheriff asked abruptly: "Were you at the bank this evening, Martin?"

"Yes—ah—oh, yes," the old bookkeeper faltered. "I—my books were off thirty-nine cents. I went back after supper to get a balance." He turned to the other men from the bank: "I often work on the books of an evening, you know."

The sheriff started to ask another question when Mr. Dayton interrupted: "Just a moment, Bolton." To the old bookkeeper he said kindly: "Martin, before we go farther, I wish to say that I have the utmost confidence in you." His grave, troubled eyes sought the faces of the others in that intensely interested and wondering group. "For forty years Martin Bevis has held a posi-

tion of trust in our bank. He was installed as bookkeeper a few days before I, myself, became connected with the institution. We have worked together in the Orchard Hill First National too many years not to know each other. I would trust you, Martin, with my life."

Martin, too deeply moved for words, could only bow and mumble his thanks. Ann, sensing that the banker's little tribute to her father prefaced a matter of grave import, moved close to Martin's chair. Old Tony came out of his corner and took his place by Pierre's side.

Again the sheriff made as if to speak, and Mr. Dayton silenced him with: "Wait, Sheriff." To the old bookkeeper the banker then said solemnly: "Martin, Mr. Campbell, our cashier, was found dead in his office at the bank to-night, and twenty-five thousand dollars has been taken from the vault."

Martin Bevis leaned forward in his chair. "Dead!" he whispered hoarsely, "John Campbell dead!" He groped for his daughter's hand, and gazed with fearful eyes from face to face. With her free hand, Ann patted his shoulder with a reassuring touch. "Dead!" he whispered again.

"Murdered," said the sheriff bluntly.

Old Tony caught Pierre's arm.

Ann gave a little cry.

Martin gasped: "But how? Where? I—I can't believe it!"

"The janitor discovered it," explained banker Dayton. "You know Jim takes care of two or three other offices and often it is quite late when he gets around to us."

"Yes, I know," Martin returned dully. "Jim hadn't come this evening when I left."

"Now, Mr. Dayton," said the sheriff, in a tone which indicated that he proposed to take charge of affairs, "you'll excuse me but we're just not getting anywhere. I don't want to appear hard, nor hurt anybody's feelings, but after all, you know, I happen to be sheriff of this county, and if you don't mind *I'd* like to ask a few questions."

The banker bowed. "Certainly, Sheriff Bolton, we will all be glad to answer anything we can."

The officer, with his gaze fixed on the floor, seemed to be arranging his thoughts. The others waited apprehensively.

Suddenly the sheriff raised his head and fixed Old Tony Latour with a steady look. "What are

you doing here at this time of night, Tony?"

The old actor was startled. "I, sir?"

"Yes, you. Old codgers like you have no business being out this time of night; what are you doing here?"

Old Tony smiled. "Why, sir, I just dropped in for a little good-by call on my young friend, Pierre. He is leaving on the early morning train for New York, as you may have heard."

The sheriff looked at Pierre with amused contempt. "Oh, yes—you are going to be an actor, I understand."

Pierre answered with quiet dignity: "That is my intention, sir."

"Yeah? Well, you will have to postpone going away for a little while, understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The sheriff turned back to Old Tony. "What time was it when you first got here this evening?"

"I can't say exactly—nine, or a quarter past —I think."

Scott spoke: "I saw him at the Owl Drug Store about nine, Sheriff."

The sheriff continued questioning the old actor: "You came here straight from the drug store?"

"Yes."

"Around the square, past the bank on the corner, and up Elm Street, I suppose?"

Old Tony hesitated. "Yes, sir."

"Uh-huh—well, Tony, did you happen to see any one near the bank?"

The old actor's heart sank. While he appeared to be searching his memory before answering he was in reality thinking of Pierre and the boy's strange conduct when he saw him on the street, and when Pierre first came home. His frightened gaze traveled from Ann to Martin pleadingly. He dared not look at Pierre.

"Well, do you remember seeing anybody in the neighborhood of the bank?" demanded the sheriff.

"No, sir."

The sheriff turned his attention to Pierre. "Young man, suppose you tell us about your movements this evening. Been here at home ever since supper, have you?"

"No, sir. I was here a while, then I went out, then I came back."

"Oh, you did? What time did you go out?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you go?"

"I—I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I mean, sir, it is hard for me to tell you."

"So it appears. Well, I guess you'd better tell just the same, son."

"I—I was just wandering around. You see, sir, I was—I was—I mean, I was feeling so badly about going away to school I—I didn't notice where I went."

"Were you in the vicinity of the bank any time while you were wandering about?"

"I—I don't think so, sir."

The sheriff turned abruptly to Ann. "Mrs. Carey, when we came in here to-night you seemed terribly upset about something—what was the trouble?"

Poor Ann could not answer. Pierre's wild words when he left her earlier in the evening; Old Tony's account of having seen him near the bank; the boy's strange conduct when he first returned home, and Bruce's letter all combined to put her on the rack. She looked appealingly from face to face.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Carey," said the sheriff, "but you'd better answer."

Suddenly Ann found her voice. "I was feeling badly about Pierre's leaving us in the morning."

"Oh, that was it!" the sheriff's tone was some-

what incredulous. "Well, what time do you think it was when Pierre left the house to go wandering about, he don't know where, because he was feeling so bad about leavin' you?"

Ann hesitated.

"Well?" said the sheriff shortly.

"It was some time after eight, I think."

"And when did he get home?"

"Around half past nine."

"When Old Tony got here, then, Pierre was not in yet?"

"Pierre came in a few minutes later."

"And what time did your pa get home from the bank?"

Ann waited a little before answering. Then she said in a low voice: "About nine o'clock."

"Neither Pierre, Old Tony, nor your father was here in the house with you until nine o'clock and after?"

"No, sir."

"Mrs. Carey, where is your husband?"

Ann controlled herself with a visible effort. "Bruce is in Camden—I—I suppose."

"You suppose? Don't you *know?*"

Mr. Dayton interrupted: "Perhaps I can tell you better about Bruce, Sheriff Bolton."

"All right, Mr. Dayton, go ahead."

"We sent Bruce, who is a clerk in our bank, you know, to Camden to deliver some important papers to the president of the Farmers' National there."

"We? Who is 'we'?"

The banker answered crisply: "The Orchard Hill First National Bank. Our cashier, Mr. Campbell, made the arrangement. It was necessary that the papers be in Camden before the bank opened to-morrow morning."

Mr. Wilson, the bank teller, spoke: "I met some friends who came in on the seven-forty train this evening, and I saw Bruce board the train just as it was pulling out."

The sheriff turned to his deputy: "Scott, get me the president of the Farmers' National in Camden—Fuller, is his name. The phone is in the hall there."

Mr. Dayton rose quickly. "Let me talk to Mr. Fuller, Sheriff. If you question him about Bruce it might look—well—strange, you know."

"All right," the sheriff agreed, "I only want to make sure Bruce is there."

Mr. Dayton stepped to the telephone and the

others, listening, heard him say: "Camden—Valley two-four-six."

"Is Mr. Fuller in? . . .

"Hello, Henry! this is Ed Dayton speaking. Sorry to disturb you, but I wanted to make sure that you received those papers. . . .

"Good. Bruce got them to you about nine o'clock, you say? Fine!

"Yes, we expect him home on the first train to-morrow. . . .

"Oh, so our cashier phoned you just before Bruce's train left.

"Campbell phoned at seven-fifteen, you say? . . .

"I'm glad he did. . . .

"Oh, that's the way we do things over here, you know.

"We try to. . . .

"Yes. . . .

"Yes. . . .

"Thanks, Henry. Give my regards to Mrs. Fuller. . . .

"Good night."

As Mr. Dayton came back into the room the sheriff said: "Well, that puts Bruce Carey in the clear all right. I'll have a talk with him in the

morning soon as he gets back, though. He may know something—you never can tell. Now, Martin, tell us how you spent the evening."

The old bookkeeper started and moved uneasily in his chair. Indeed the nervous tension of the entire company was increased as if they sensed in the sheriff's voice and manner an approaching crisis.

Martin asked tremulously, "Shall I start when I left the house with Bruce?"

"Yes. What time was that?"

"Just a little after seven o'clock. Bruce was going to take the train to Camden at seven-forty, you know, and as I had to go back to the bank to work on the books, we walked as far as the bank together."

"All right, go on."

"Well, when we arrived at the bank, Bruce said 'Good-by' and went on down the street. I went into the bank and—"

"Just a minute. Which entrance?"

"What?"

"I said, which entrance. Did you go in through the front door on the square, or by the side door on Elm Street?"

"Oh, the side door, of course. We always use that door after banking hours."

"Do you carry a key to that door with you all the time?"

"I have carried a key to that door for forty years, sir."

"Who else carries a key to that door?"

Mr. Dayton answered: "All the bank employees have keys to that door, Sheriff."

"I see. And who has the combination of the safe, Mr. Dayton?"

The president answered reluctantly: "Mr. Campbell, Mr. Wilson here, and Martin."

"Mr. Wilson, who locked the safe at the close of the day's work this afternoon?"

"I did. Martin and I were together when I locked up. We were the last to leave the bank."

"Are you sure that the missing twenty-five thousand was in the safe at that time?"

"As teller it was my business to know that the money was there. You see, we are only a small country bank and the way we handle our cash such an item could not have been overlooked."

"After you locked up, you and Martin left the bank together, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you say you two were the last to leave?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are positive there wasn't anybody left in the building?"

"I *think* there was no one; I can't be absolutely sure of it."

"Why can't you be sure?"

"Because, as you know, that side door on Elm Street opens into a little hall or passage which, as you enter from the street, is connected by an arch with the main room on the left. On the right, are the doors to the cashier's office and the president's office. When Martin and I left, I did not look into either of those rooms."

"Martin, tell us exactly what you did after Bruce left you in front of the Elm Street entrance to the bank. First you unlocked the door and entered, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Then—why then, of course I locked the door again. Then I went to the vault and—"

"Did you stop in that hallway?"

"No, sir, I had no reason to stop there."

"Were the doors to the two offices off that hall open or closed?"

"I—really—Sheriff, I couldn't say."

"All right, go ahead."

"Well, I went straight to the vault and—"

"What did you do with your cane?"

"My cane?"

"Yes, you have carried a cane, a heavy gold-headed cane, for several years, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes, certainly—I put my cane in the corner at the far end of the hall where I always leave it."

"The door to the cashier's office is close to the corner at the far end of the hall, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you don't remember noticing whether that door was open or shut when you set your cane in the corner close beside it?"

"I really did not notice, Sheriff. If I did, I have forgotten it."

"All right—go on."

"I—where was I? Oh, yes—I opened the vault, got out my books and went to work."

"And when you finished work?"

"I put my books away in the vault, locked up and came straight home."

"Bring your cane with you?"

"Oh certainly, of course, I always have my cane—it is in the hall out there."

"Found your cane where you left it in the

corner near the door to the cashier's office, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Martin, did any one come into the bank while you were there this evening?"

"Positively no, sir."

"Wasn't the cashier in his office when you arrived at the bank, or didn't he come in while you were there?"

"I—I don't think so, sir. Now that you mention it, he might have been."

"Yeah—he *might* have been. The fact is he *was*. He was alive at seven-fifteen when he telephoned Fuller at Camden. He was found dead in his office at nine-thirty. He had been dead an hour at least when the body was discovered. Bruce's train left at seven-forty so you must have arrived at the bank close to seven-twenty, and you arrived home about nine. Campbell was killed while you were in the bank. He was hit on the head with some blunt instrument—a black jack, a club, or something like that. The twenty-five thousand was in the safe when you and Mr. Wilson left the bank this afternoon. When we were there this evening looking around, Mr. Wilson opened the safe and the money was gone.

Martin, where is that Masonic watch charm that the lodge gave you?"

The old bookkeeper clutched at his watch guard in sudden fright. "It's gone!" he cried and looked piteously around as if stunned, while he muttered brokenly, "I—I wouldn't take a fortune for that sacred emblem!"

The sheriff extended his hand. "Here it is, Martin."

"You found it!"

He reached out to take the charm but the sheriff closed his hand on it. "This must be your charm, Martin, because it has your name and everything engraved on the back."

"Yes, yes, it is mine. There can be no mistake; the members of our lodge here in Orchard Hill gave it to me. Where in the world did you find it?"

The sheriff answered slowly: "I found it beside the body of the murdered cashier, Martin."

The old bookkeeper looked slowly around. "I—I'm afraid I don't understand. Why—why are you all staring at me like that?"

The sheriff said quietly: "I'm sorry, Martin, but it is my duty to place you under arrest."

The poor old bookkeeper slumped down in his

chair. Ann, with a low cry, put her arms about him.

The sheriff spoke to his deputy, "We'll take that cane too, Scott."

Through her tears, Ann appealed to the bank president: "Mr. Dayton—you can't—you're not going to let them take my father to jail?"

The bank president answered sadly: "If it were nothing more than the missing money, Ann, I could prevent it, but in a case of—but this other thing—it is out of my hands. It is preposterous, of course, that your father should be suspected of having anything to do with this dreadful affair. You may rest assured that I shall do everything in my power to help him—we all will. When your husband returns in the morning, perhaps he—"

Ann interrupted with a startled cry. Then, with a pitiful attempt to cover her confusion, "Yes, yes, Mr. Dayton, perhaps Bruce can help when—when he comes home in the morning."

When the men from the bank and the sheriff and his deputy with Martin were gone, Old Tony endeavored to comfort Ann, who was beside herself with grief. Pierre stood apart, not knowing what to do.

"Of course it is all just one of those horrible mistakes which sometimes happen," said the old actor. "It's terrible, terrible, I know. But everything will be straightened out shortly. I wish Bruce were here. Perhaps we had better telephone him—perhaps he—"

"No, no," cried Ann, "you can't telephone. It's no use—no use!"

At this Pierre went quickly to her and without a word took her in his arms.

Old Tony regarded them thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right," he said at last. "At any rate it will be only a few hours until Bruce is home."

"No, no," cried Ann again. "You do not understand, Father Tony!" Frantically she drew the letter from her pocket and thrust it toward him. "Here, read this—Bruce—Bruce is not coming home in the morning."

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

DRIPPING SPRING is a spot in the Nevada desert. On the map, Dripping Spring is not even a spot. The nearest human habitation—if Jimmie Harrigan's camp in the Biscuit Hills may be called a habitation—is a day and a half to the west and south by a faintly marked trail. Red Butte, a typical desert mining town, lies to the east—two days by trail across Burro Mesa. Red Butte touches civilization by way of a road eighty miles to Red Butte Station, which is on a railroad which connects with another railroad which crosses the continent.

The vast and lonely expanse of Burro Mesa slopes imperceptibly toward the west and a slight depression, beginning somewhere in the central part of this great plain and conforming to the general slope, deepens into a draw, develops into an arroyo, and becomes at last a canyon which opens out onto the lower desert levels where the mesa ends in a wall-like declivity.

Dripping Spring is in the mouth of this canyon. The place is known only to a few venturesome prospectors and their kind. It would be difficult to imagine a scene in greater contrast to the Ohio village where Pierre Donovan had grown to manhood, and it is no wonder that the soda fountain clerk amid such surroundings was bewildered and dismayed.

The end of the day was near and the pack-saddles, boxes, sacks, bed rolls, and cooking utensils which were lying about indicated a camp for the night. Pierre, tired and begrimed with dust and sweat from a long march on the hot desert trail, was searching among the thinly scattered weeds and stunted bushes for something which might do to make a campfire. Often he paused to look wonderingly around as if he were trying to believe that he was not in the grip of some fantastic and hideous dream.

From that lonely spot the vast expanse of the desert stretched away mile upon mile until in the mysterious distance of quivering light and colors, earth and sky became one. The sun was almost touching the higher peaks of a mountain range which was so far away that it appeared as a low-

hanging gray-blue cloud; but in all the sky there was no cloud—not the tiniest puff of white; not the thinnest raveling of cloud stuff relieved the immensity of the unfathomable blue vault. And the land lay as empty and as silent as the sky. The constantly changing colors were like shifting folds of transparent scarves and veils of every hue floating in seas of pearl and crystal light. The fantastic forms and combinations of mesas and mountains and hills and valleys were as if some grotesque god had dreamed them into a bewildering maze. The loneliness, the silence, of the empty sky and empty desert, to Harriet Noël's son, were appalling.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a rich Irish voice which came from around a jutting corner of the canyon wall. "Come away out of that now, Kate! Ye blunderin', pig-headed, lousy old she-devil av a burro! Come away! Can't I never larn ye to keep yer dirty nose out av the spring and take yer drink here in the hole I've fixed fer ye? 'Tis five years and more that I've been waterin' ye at this place, and niver a time that ye did not try fer to spoil the drink fer yer betters. Who the hell d' ye think ye are, any-

way? Ye damned old slab-sided, moth-et bundle av bones, ye!"

Pierre turned his face toward the place from which the voice came and smiled. Then, with more energy, he proceeded with his task of gathering material for a fire.

The voice came again: "Hey, you Jack, look to yer feet whilst I put yer hobbles on. Hold still, will ye! I know ye don't like the bracelets, no more do I. If ye didn't think yerself sich a hell-roarin' boy amongst the ladies I wouldn't be havin' to restrict yer movements like this! Nineteen years old, if ye are a day, and ye've still no more sense than to be leavin' good food and water and go gallivantin' over the adjacent country on a chance that mebby ye might find somebody to seduce! Ye old hell-bender, ye! There ye are! Now git on, the lot of yez. You, Kate—Molly—hup-hi—Biddie—hup—git away wid ye and find yer supper; ye've drunk enough fer beasts twice yer size! Go on away, Jack. Hup-hi! Git on! Ye can't stand droolin' here be the spring all night, ye philanderin' old devil ye!"

There was a sound of blows and scurrying hoofs, a concluding shout and then from around

the rocky corner came a man of the desert. His age might have been anywhere from forty to eighty. Not above five feet ten in height, his lean stringy body was as straight as a gun-barrel and seemingly as hard, and he walked with the easy, tireless movement of the old-time prospector. The years he had lived under the fierce desert sun had given his skin the texture and color of dry old leather; desert winds and dust had marked his features with a network of innumerable lines; desert skies had given his blue eyes a serene courage, an unwavering fidelity, and a childlike wonderment which was not less evident because of their twinkling Irish humor. In one hand he carried four lead ropes, in the other a cloth-covered canteen, dripping wet from the spring. Tossing the ropes on the nearest pack-saddle he took the canteen to Pierre.

"Av all the damned jack-asses I've ever known in my long and variegated career—an' I've known a lot, animal and human—thim four old burros av mine do be the most exasperatin' limit! Fer contrary stubbornness, malicious malice-aforethought, evil propensities, devilish deception and pig-headed damn foolishness the likes av thim is not to be found between Oklahoma and the

Pacific Ocean, and that's the truth or my name's not Jimmie Harrigan! Have a drink?"

Pierre smiled. "Thanks, Mr. Harrigan, but I filled up at the spring when we first arrived."

"Sure ye did, but have another, anyhow. Too much water will be an experience that ye'll remember wid disbelievin' pleasure when ye're out in that danged old fryin' pan av a desert yonder."

Pierre, with a laugh, raised the canteen to his lips.

"Speakin' av water," the desert man continued, "there do be tracks av strange burros down around the spring. I looked but the beasts never come from my place and 'tis sure they did not come from Red Butte or we would have seen their signs these last two days. I'm thinkin' 'tis more than likely thim burros belong to the two men ye're lookin' fer."

"You think Bruce Carey and the man he is with are near here?" cried Pierre eagerly.

"No, lad, 'tis certain I am that Colorado Bill and his friend Burnes, that you think is the man Bruce Carey that ye're so wishful to find, are not in this neighborhood. 'Tis like I told you —I seen thim men wid me own two eyes a-headin'

toward Mother Mountain. They ain't come back or they'd be here, or at least their tracks would. Now, the only water-hole on Mother Mountain is Blackwater Tanks, which is no more than a hollow in the rocks, and not livin' water like Drippin' Spring here. Sometimes, do ye see, there's water at the Tanks, and sometimes agin there is not. These burros bein' here at Drippin' Spring may have come back from Blackwater Tanks because there's little or no water there right now, which is to be expected, we've had no rain in these parts fer so long a time."

"But if there is no water the men would come back, too, wouldn't they?"

"They would if—" The Irishman hesitated, then as if to reassure his companion, "It may be av course, that there's a *little* water in the Tanks, and that Colorado Bill has turned his burros loose to save what drink there is fer himself and yer friend, Bruce, knowing that the beasts would come back here to Drippin' Spring and that he could pick them up agin on his way back to Red Butte after he and yer friend had stayed on Mother Mountain as long as what little water there is in the Tanks lasts. But I don't like it at all."

"Is there anything we can do, Mr. Harrigan?"

"Nothin' more than to go straight ahead as ye planned. But 'tis well that ye have no burros to bother wid to-morrow. You can carry enough water to last ye to Mother Mountain and back here again, and wid no burros to hinder ye can go fast. But 'tis on me mind that ye'll not get far 'til ye meet yer men on their way back to Drippin' Spring wid their tongues hangin' out. 'Tis a terrible bit av desert ye're headin' into, lad, and av I was not dead sure ye could not miss findin' yer friend and Colorado Bill I'd niver let ye start out alone at all. But av ye do as I tell ye ye'll come out av it safe enough. Av ye make any mistakes ye'll niver come out—and that's the truth."

"You have been awfully good to me, Mr. Harrigan," said Pierre. "I never could have found Bruce without you to guide me this far and show me the way. It was lucky for me that I met you at Red Butte."

"Sure, any lad wid the name av Donovan would have a claim on a Harrigan," returned the Irishman with a chuckle. "I will admit, though, that the Pierre part of yer name give me pause fer a bit. I only hope that this stranger wid Colo-

rado Bill is sure enough the man, Bruce, that ye're huntin'!"

"It must be Bruce," cried Pierre. "The description fits Bruce exactly, and he and Colorado Bill left Red Butte together for Colorado Bill's mine in the Painted Mountains."

"Colorado has some sort of a claim in the Painted Mountains, I guess—at any rate he says he has. He tells me 'tis only a day's travel beyond my camp in the Biscuit Hills, but I ain't never been there to see fer myself—my trust in Colorado Bill not bein' strong enough to make me wishful to walk a day there and another day back, do you see? But Colorado never took yer friend to any claim in the Painted Mountains this trip, because the two av thim went to Mother Mountain like I told ye. They're out fer to hunt that lost Mother Mountain lode or I'm a Dutchman!"

"Was it right here that you met them?"

"Sure, they was camped right on this identical spot. The man, Bruce, was sittin' on his bed roll not ten feet from where ye're sittin' this minute. Ye see I have to camp here at Drippin' Spring whin I go to town fer supplies, and whin I come back too, fer the matter av that, because this is

the only water. Everybody else that's goin' anywhere in this part av the world has to camp here fer the same reason. Colorado and this other man was already beddin' down fer the night when I arrived.

"We gave each other how-de-do an' passed the time av day and settled the weather question, whiles I was strippin' the packs off me burros, and then Colorado says: 'Ye're bound fer Red Butte, I take it, Jim?'

" 'Take it er leave it,' I says, 'that's where I'm headed fer.'

" 'When are you comin' back?' says he.

" 'That depends,' says I, 'upon me inclinations and the injucements which may seduce me to prolong me visit in the metropolis of Red Butte.'

"Wid that he says, 'I'm takin' Mr. Burnes, here, out to see my claim in the Painted Mountains.'

" 'Good luck to the both of yez,' says I. But the next mornin' they hung back from startin' so that I had told thim good-by and was away up the hill to the top av the mesa before they stirred a foot from this spot. 'Twas from the top av the first little ridge that I stopped a minute fer

a look back, as I always do, and there, plain as the nose on yer face, I could see thim kickin' up the dust away over yonder headin' straight fer Mother Mountain."

"Who is this man, Colorado Bill, Mr. Harrigan? What does he look like?"

"Wal, he's a fairish big lump af a man wid grizzly whiskers all over his face—older, I'm thinkin', than ye'd guess and hard as rock, and he's got a cold, distrustful kind av an eye like he was wishful not to have too much known about himself. He drifted into Red Butte a few years back—said he was from Colorado and aimed to prospect this country. Everybody calls him Colorado, as is the custom in these parts and nobody ever asked him any questions, which agin is our habit an' a handy habit it is fer some av us as you yourself, I'm thinkin', can testify."

Pierre ignored the Irishman's hint. "I can't imagine how Bruce ever came to know a man like that," he said thoughtfully. "It's darned funny, if you ask me!"

"'Tis right you are, me lad, and now ye're speakin' av it, there's a lot av things about the whole business that's funny, damned funny, if ye ask *me*—not exceptin' yerself—meanin' no of-

fense, do ye see? But here ye come boilin' right out av nowhere, crazy wild to find a man that nobody knows, who's gone off wid somebody else that nobody knows, to somewhere nobody knows where, nor fer why. We've pounded the trail two days together, and camped one night, and divil a word have ye said to let me know if ye're from China or South America or some island in the sea."

Pierre moved uneasily but did not speak.

" 'Tis all right, av course," said Jimmie apologetically. "If it were not that I'm gettin' to like ye a hell av a lot I wouldn't be botherin' about who ye are or where ye come from, or why."

Pierre turned impulsively toward the man of the desert and made as if to speak. Then, as suddenly, he checked himself. For a moment he looked beseechingly into the older man's eyes, then, with a helpless gesture, turned sadly away to stand gazing out over the awe-inspiring scene.

Presently he said: "Where is this Mother Mountain, Mr. Harrigan, can we see it from here?"

The old prospector went to stand beside his young companion, saying: "I may as well be givin'

ye the lay av the land so ye'll have it all clear in yer head to-morrow. This way, straight east av us, two days on foot across Burro Mesa, will take ye back to the town of Red Butte, as ye already know, havin' come from there wid me yesterday and to-day." He pointed to the southwest. "Do ye see that bunch av funny little round hills away over there?"

"Yes."

"Well, thim is the Biscuit Hills where my mine is. 'Tis only a prospect now but it will be a mine some day by the grace av God and my pick and shovel. My camp is one day go from where we're standin'. Ye can see the trail startin' down there by that big conglomerate rock. Ye'll have no trouble followin' that trail av ye should wish to come to my camp where ye'll always find a welcome, wid good water and a bite to eat. That patch av color that looks like a bit av a crazy quilt, beyond and a little to the south av the Biscuit Hills, is the Painted Mountains where our friend Colorado Bill told me he was takin' Mr. Burnes, or Bruce or whoever he is.

"Now look away straight to the north. Do ye see that blue mountain risin' right up out av the desert, wid two rounded peaks stickin' up

against the sky exactly like the two breasts av a woman? That, my boy, is Mother Mountain, where yer goin' to find Colorado Bill and yer man Bruce Carey, if so be ye don't meet thim comin' back. Blackwater Tanks, where the water is when there is any, is at the foot av the mountain, on this side. As we're looking at it 'twould be right under the little hollow between the two breasts. From here to the Tanks at the foot av Mother Mountain is a day and a half if you don't go too slow. There is always water here at Drippin' Spring; there is always water at my place in the Biscuit Hills. Sometimes, for a while after the rains, there is water at the Tanks. And, except fer these three places, there is never a drop av water in all this land for many and many a hot and weary mile.

"From Blackwater Tanks there is a way that a man might go on the far side of Skeleton Peaks two days or more until he struck the road which runs from Red Butte north to Gold Center. From where he would strike the road it would be another day to Gold Center, or he could turn south and go two days to Red Butte. But in all that way there's not enough moisture to wet the tongue av a horned toad. No man in his right

mind would ever think av tryin' that route widout burros to carry water. Ye can see Skeleton Peaks —thim red lookin' jagged steeples and chimneys to the east of Mother Mountain."

"I see," said Pierre.

"And do ye mind how I showed ye the Burnt Hills as we was comin' across the mesa from Red Butte to here?"

"Yes."

"Well, between Burnt Hills and thim Skeleton Peaks is a bit av country that we call Skeleton Sink. 'Tis a low-lyin' bed av an ancient sea or lake or somethin', all alkali and sulphur wid a jumble of red and yellow and black rocks. An' the sun beats down on the white alkali like a furnace, wid niver a breath av wind to stir the dead stinkin' air. There's no livin' thing that's ever gone into that hell-hole and come out alive—not even a bird can fly over it. And the way that ye will go from here to Mother Mountain is along the west side of this Skeleton Sink. Our desert Indians call it right enough, 'the place av the dead'!"

As if in mentioning the route Pierre would follow to Mother Mountain he had approached a subject upon which he did not wish to dwell,

the Irishman turned abruptly and began kindling the campfire.

But Pierre, caught in the spell of the desert, continued to gaze upon the awe-inspiring scene. "I can't make it seem real," he said in a hushed voice. "Gee, how I wish Father Tony could see this! If only he were here!"

"Father Tony!" exclaimed the Irishman. "'Tis a good lad ye are to be wishin' for the company av a priest."

Pierre laughed. "Father Tony is not a priest, Mr. Harrigan."

"No? What thin?"

"He is an actor. I call him Father Tony because he has always been like a father to me. You should hear him read 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players'!"

As Pierre spoke the lines with his best stage voice and manner, Jimmie Harrigan stood up and looked at his companion with a new interest.

"By George!" Pierre exclaimed with quick excitement, "*that's* what's the matter with it!"

"What's the matter with what?" demanded the puzzled Irishman.

"Why, all this!" with a wide, sweeping gesture, Pierre indicated their immediate surroundings

and the vast stretch of country which lay within their view. "I know now why it's not real to me—it's because it is only a stage set. Don't you see? 'All the world's a stage.'" His gesture again included the landscape from horizon to horizon. "Robert Service saw it that way:

Have you gazed on naked grandeur where there's nothing
else to gaze on,
Set pieces and drop-curtain scenes galore—

Don't you see it, Mr. Harrigan? Don't you —the set pieces and drop curtain scenes, and everything, just like a stage scene in a great theater. And you and I and Bruce and this man Colorado Bill, we are the actors." He paused and stood for a long moment with that look in his eyes as if he were seeing things which his companion could not see. Then he said reverently: "And mother—mother is standing there in the wings."

The desert man turned uneasily to his work of preparing their supper but watched his companion with doubtful glances.

"Av I was to make a guess now about a thing which is none av my business at all," he said ten-

tatively, "I would say that ye do be somethin' av a play actor yerself."

Pierre, who was still in the grip of his emotional reaction to the scene, answered mechanically, "I am."

"Oh—ho, well, well! Sure I—"

Pierre interrupted him. "That is, I mean, I was going to be an actor. My mother"—he controlled his voice with an effort—"my mother was an actress. I was on the stage with her when I was a little chap. She used to stand in the wings when I played my parts. I think she does it yet. She died when I was only a boy."

"The saints preserve us!" muttered the Irishman.

Pierre continued: "Mother thought I was going to be a great actor. I thought so too. But now, well, I'm nothing but a soda jerk—a clerk in a soda fountain, you know—in the Owl Drug Store."

"A soft drink bartender, heh? Well, 'tis a nice respectable, lady-like job."

"I was all ready to go to New York to study for the stage. That was what mother planned for me, and she left the money with Father Tony,

but Bruce— Oh, well, that part of it is all over now."

"It must have been somethin' mighty serious to send you away out here in this Nevada desert," Jimmie Harrigan remarked shrewdly.

Pierre did not answer.

"This Father Tony, he's not yer real father—ye say?"

"Oh, no, he was—he was just a friend of mother's. I haven't seen my own father since I was a little chap; I don't even know if he is living."

"And have you no kin—no brother or uncle or somebody like that to help ye out av this trouble, whatever it is?"

"No, no, I have nobody but Father Tony, and —and Ann."

As if in speaking the name of Ann he had aroused himself to a fuller realization of the situation, he cried with sudden fierce excitement: "I've simply *got* to find Bruce, Mr. Harrigan. If I can get to him in time, everything may all come right yet."

"There, there, me boy. 'Tis no good losin' yer grip av yerself. It don't do—not in this here desert. Ye'll find yer man to-morrow or next day

all right. Come now and put yerself outside a good fill av beans and bacon, wid plenty java to wash it down. 'Tis food that'll make the world look brighter to ye."

For a while they ate in silence. The sun dropped below the distant mountains, but the day lingered with continually changing lights and shadows and colors that were never the same but dissolved and melted into new combinations even as the eye tried to hold them.

The food and the matter-of-fact business of eating restored Pierre to a less emotional state of mind and presently he asked: "What is it that you think Colorado and Bruce are looking for, Mr. Harrigan?"

" 'Tis mórtal sure I am that they're lookin' fer the lost Mother Mountain lode. And I'm thinkin' they must have got hold av a danged good notion too about where it is else why would Colorado go into that country this dry time av the year an' why would he lie to me like he did about where they was goin'?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand—what is it they are looking for?"

"An' have ye never heard tell av the lost lode of Mother Mountain?'

Pierre shook his head. "I confess I don't even know what you are talking about."

The man of the desert laughed as he said, "Which is proof enough that ye've come from some place that's a long, long way from Nevada."

"But what is this lode—a load of what?"

Again the Irishman laughed. "Will ye listen to that—a load av what—your ignorance, me lad, is as amazing as it is ridiculous! Well thin, listen to me—scientifically and technically speakin' as a man what has followed prospectin' more years than I'll ever tell: A lode is a mineral-bearin' vein. In this case the mineral is gold."

"Oh, I understand," said Pierre.

"Oh, but ye do not understand 'til I have enlightened ye farther," retorted Jimmie. "This lost Mother Mountain lode is a hell av a big vein av gold somewhere in Mother Mountain. Nobody knows exactly where it is, though many, includin' myself, have had a try fer to find it. The reason 'tis lost is because the prospector who discovered it went and got himself lost in Skeleton Sink. Some geologist sharps who was prowlin' around on the edge of the Sink just beyond the Burnt Mountains found the poor old prospector's bones, and what was left av his clothes, and a

little bag full av the richest gold quartz that has ever been seen in Nevada. Some months later another prospector found what was left av this poor desert rat's outfit at Blackwater Tanks. What had happened was easy to see: The prospector that found this rich gold lode found it somewhere within strikin' distance of Blackwater Tanks. The water in the Tanks failed and he was forced to get away from there in a hurry—within an hour av the time he struck his rich find, like as not. With his little bag of gold—he could not carry more, even if he could have stopped to get it—he struck out fer Drippin' Spring, half crazy with thinkin' av the millions he had found and was forced fer want av water to leave, and near dead already with thirst because he would not leave until the last minute. Considerin' the poor divil's condition, mental and physical, do ye see, it would have been a miracle av he had not wandered off the trail to the Spring here, into that pit av hell, Skeleton Sink. The heat, the blindin', dazzlin', chokin' alkali, the thirst, the horrors av that place av torment, finished him. The wonder is that he managed to get as far as the foot of the Burnt Mountains where his remains was found. 'Tis like I tell ye, lad, nothin'

livin' ever went into Skeleton Sink and come out av it alive."

In the silence which followed Jimmie Harrigan's recital of this desert tragedy, the Irishman pulled at his pipe moodily. The smoke from his lips floated undisturbed in the motionless air—from the pipe bowl a thin blue thread rose straight up toward the evening sky. The campfire had burned to a bed of ashes which half revealed the ruddy glow of a few underlying coals. The silence of death was over the desert, which lay now shadowy and mysterious, with the distant mountains to the west, blue-black silhouettes against the afterglow which lighted the sky with gold and orange and mauve, shading high overhead into pale green and blue and violet, and deepening into the velvet purple-blue of night. To the north, the rounded breasts of Mother Mountain lifted out of the shadowy mystery below into the glory of the evening light.

Pierre moved closer to his companion. "Are you sure, Mr. Harrigan, that I will be able to find my way to Mother Mountain alone? I'm not much good in this desert, you know. It's—it's all so different from my home. It's so strange, so—so awful."

The man of the desert answered reassuringly, "Av I did not know that it would be impossible fer ye to miss the way to Blackwater Tanks from here, I would not let ye stir a foot. But there's not one step av the way that Mother Mountain will not be before yer two eyes as clear as you can see her there now in the light of the sky. All ye have to do is to steer straight fer that little hollow between her two breasts an' ye'll run right into the Tanks. Av ye was comin' this way from Blackwater Tanks to Drippin' Spring here, it would be different, fer then, do ye see, there would be no hollow between the breasts of a Mother Mountain to guide ye. But ye'll find Colorado Bill and yer friend Bruce at the Tanks if ye do not meet thim, and Colorado will know the way back here. So have no fear, lad, ye'll be a danged sight safer on yer way to-morrow as long as ye go straight fer the hollow between Mother Mountain's breasts, than ye would be crossin' the streets av yer home city, wherever that is."

Pierre gazed at the distant mountain as if fascinated. "I don't mind saying that I'm scared," he confessed at last. "I wish there was some other way—that I didn't have to go. If I knew

who this Colorado Bill was, or if I knew what Bruce—" He paused.

The Irishman looked at him sharply and puffed at his pipe with sudden energy. "See here, me lad, there's one thing ye've got to tell me: Is this man, Bruce Carey, like to be friendly to ye, or not? Because, do ye see, av he's likely to be any way hostile, well, ye're not goin', that's all—not alone anyhow."

"But I must go, Mr. Harrigan, no matter how Bruce receives me, I must go to him for Ann's sake."

"For Ann's sake, is it? And av it would not be too presumptious, might I ask who is Ann?"

"Ann is Bruce's wife."

"Oh, ho, so Ann is Bruce's wife. And is Ann, by any chance, a sister or anything like that to you?"

"No, neither Bruce nor Ann is related to me, but we all grew up together in the same village, and I lived with them after they were married."

"I see—and now ye've come away out here in this Nevada desert where ye're as strange as a pussy cat in the Arctic Ocean, because ye must find Bruce fer Ann's sake! Well, well—it somehow strikes me a bit queer that Ann's husband

should need findin' by anybody. But if Ann has managed to mislay her man, as 'tis well-known some women have a way av doin', I suppose 'tis natural under the circumstances that ye should be the one to find him fer her."

"But it was not Ann's fault," Pierre shouted, rising to his feet and pacing to and fro in sudden excitement. And then, bewildered as he still was by those tragic events in Orchard Hill, worn by nervous anxiety, and the physical strain of his journey, and appalled by his strange and terrible surroundings, Pierre talked recklessly.

"Bruce is a damned fool! He ran away and left Ann for no reason at all. He charged Ann with being in love with—with another man—said he had known for a long time that she was being intimate with this other man. God damn his soul, he knows that is not true! He knows it couldn't be true! He's only pretending to believe such a rotten thing. He made it up as an excuse for going away and deserting Ann, but he'll never get away with it—never. Not if I live to get to him!"

"Yer friend, Bruce Carey, appears to be a resourceful sort of a cuss," said Jimmie. "But

what fer do ye think is he roamin' about this desert wid Colorado Bill?"

"Why, you see, Mr. Harrigan, somebody in Red Butte had been trying for a long time to persuade Bruce to buy an interest in a gold mine, and Bruce was wild to go into it only he didn't have money enough. Then—well—then he got hold of some money and disappeared. Father Tony and Ann and I figured that he had gone to Red Butte so I came out to find him and take him back."

"And ye're thinkin' ye can take this wayward husband back to his sorrowin' wife, are ye? Well, I'm thinkin' that ye're prospectin' fer a bunch av trouble and that ye'll sure strike it the minute ye come up with Mr. Bruce. Take an old fool's advice, me lad, and do ye go back home and put in yer time consolin' Ann."

"Oh, but Mr. Harrigan, you don't understand! Bruce simply *must* go back to Orchard Hill."

"Orchard Hill is it! Sure that name sounds familiar! Orchard Hill! Where have I heard it? Oh, ho, so *that's* it—the bank robbin' and killin' that I was readin' about in the paper when I was in Red Butte—'twas the very day ye ar-

rived? So Mr. Bruce got hold av some money and disappeared from Orchard Hill!"

"No, no, no," cried Pierre desperately. "You're all wrong and now I've got to tell you the whole thing."

"I'm thinkin' ye'd better do that same," retorted the desert man quietly. "The whole thing has had a queer look from the first minute you and me met in Red Butte, and it's been lookin' worse and worse all the time."

"All right," returned Pierre, "I'll tell you; it was like this: Ann's father, Martin Bevis, and her husband, Bruce Carey, both worked in that bank. But on the night of the robbery—at the very hour of the robbery, Bruce was in Camden delivering some important papers to the president of the Camden bank—so everybody could see that it was impossible for him to have had anything to do with the crime. But Ann's father was at the bank working on his books when the crime was committed, and that and some other things made them arrest him. We all thought that when Bruce came home in the morning he could help, somehow, to save Ann's father, and then came this damned letter from Bruce to Ann, telling her that he was never coming back—

that he was leaving her for good because she was in love with—with this other man. So Bruce, instead of coming back home the morning after the bank crime, as he should have done, and as everybody expected him to do, disappeared no one knew where—not on account of the bank crime because he couldn't have known anything about that, but because of Ann and the other man.

"Now, don't you see why I had to come after him? Don't you see why he must go back home to Ann? We couldn't let any one in Orchard Hill know that Bruce had left Ann because she had been carrying on a love affair with another man. If you knew Orchard Hill! Even if it had been true we couldn't have punished any woman like that! And it was all so false! There wasn't a damned word of truth in it! A woman like Ann, Mr. Harrigan, couldn't be untrue to her husband, even—even if the other man had tried to make love to her. And even if Ann were willing to let such a false charge be known for herself, she couldn't let her husband brand the other man as that kind of scoundrel when she knew he was as innocent as she was.

"I don't think that Bruce himself believes what

he wrote in that letter to Ann. I think he's so crazy to get rich by going into this gold mine out here that he used the other thing as an excuse to get away from Orchard Hill. He couldn't have believed what he wrote about Ann and the other man—he simply couldn't! But whether Bruce really believes or not, whether it was true or false, it would be all the same to Orchard Hill."

"Ain't the sheriff and his bunch tryin' to find Bruce? I should think they would."

"Of course they are. And Bruce must get back home of his own free will before they find him —don't you see?"

"Sure, I see that. But what about you? I take it that *you* disappeared too without asking by your leave, and without leaving your address."

"We didn't dare let them know where we thought Bruce had gone because they would send an officer after him and then it would all come out about his leaving Ann. There was no other way but for me to find him first so he could come home as if nothing had happened between him and Ann."

"But the sheriff will be lookin' fer ye, too, won't he, lad? Considering everything, I should think

ye stood a fair chance of bein' taken back yerself!"

"I don't care what happens to me, Mr. Harrigan, if only I can find Bruce and get him home to Ann first. It's only Ann that's to be considered. I don't count. I guess I'm finished anyway."

And the man of the desert, because his heart was kind, refrained from asking any more questions, or making any further comments.

For a long time Pierre lay on his blanket-bed gazing up at the stars. His companion, lighting a fresh pipe, sat beside the dead campfire, smoking.

At last Pierre spoke softly, as men out of doors sometimes do under cover of the night while looking at the stars.

"Mr. Harrigan, were you ever married?"

The man of the desert answered in the same mood: "Not quite, lad. I was near to it once, but it missed me."

"You must at least have thought about it," said Pierre. "Every man does, I suppose."

"More or less, perhaps, but rather less than more," returned the philosophical Jimmie. "Ye see, 'tis like this: My thoughts pertainin' to the

holy state av matrimony and domestic bliss and what not, is mostly occupied wid a large and growing family av burros. Through force av circumstances over which I may or may not have had control, the years av me life that should have been given to marryin' a wife and raisin' a family have been spent in playin' nurse, guide, protector, provider, teacher, friend, father-confessor, and general divinity to a flock av burros. I've been domesticated by jack-asses. If there's one man in all this weary world av domestic bliss and anti-bliss that's jack-ass broke, I'm that unfortunate bein'. So ye can see fer yerself that I've never really felt the need av a wife and family. One jack-ass career such as I have enjoyed should be sufficient, and speakin' fer meself, it is."

But Pierre's thoughts were too far away for him to notice the humor of the Irishman's views.

"When Father Tony and my mother were young in Orchard Hill, mother would not marry him because she wanted a stage career. I think Tony should have been my real father because I am sure mother always loved him. I don't think mother ever really loved the man she did marry—the man, I mean, who became my father.

He was not a good man. He was terribly cruel to mother and me when we were all on the stage together. I can remember it all even though I was such a child. Father used to make me give up everything to Bruce. Bruce was his stepson and he thought a lot more of him than he did of me. I think he hated me. All my life I have given up to Bruce. Then father deserted mother and me—went away somewhere, we never knew where, and after that mother and I were happy. It must be hell, Mr. Harrigan, to be married to somebody you don't love. Father Tony and mother and I were very happy together in Orchard Hill.

"You believe in love, don't you, Mr. Harrigan?"

The man of the desert answered philosophically: "There must be some such thing, I suppose, to persuade men and women to make such damned fools av thimselves over one another."

"I've often wondered," Pierre continued, "how it would be to marry a girl you loved and settle down in some nice place like—well, like Orchard Hill, and be a bank clerk, or something like that all your life. But I think an actor should be wedded to his art, don't you, Mr. Harrigan? I

loved a girl once—I guess it won't do any harm away out here in the desert if I confess I love her yet. I never told her I loved her because, you see, I was going to be an actor and I don't think actors should marry. I gave this girl up for my career just as mother gave up Father Tony. I think the girl loves me, too, but we have never talked about our love. She married another man. I don't think they were very happy together; they don't seem to be made for each other. But, you see, Mr. Harrigan, when a thing like that is done, it is done forever—nothing can ever undo it. Things like that are like—well, like death. Nothing can ever bring you back from them and let you go on as if they had never happened. Mother used to say there are many things in life that are as final and irrevocable as death. When the girl you love marries some other man it is like that. The change is final —it can never be undone. The man might die, or they might be divorced, but that wouldn't undo the fact that they had been husband and wife. Nothing can ever undo that—once it's done it can never be undone. The girl and I are dead to each other. We can go on loving each other just as I love my mother who has been

dead since I was a boy, but we can't change the fact of her being the other man's wife. Nothing can ever undo that relationship any more than we can undo death itself."

There was a long silence after this. The man of the desert knocked the ashes from his pipe and lay down upon his blanket. But presently Pierre spoke again, and in the vast silence of the desert night there was a something—a timid, childish quality in the soda fountain clerk's voice —which touched the warm Irish heart of his companion.

"Are you asleep, Mr. Harrigan?"

"No, lad, but ye'd better be—ye've a long hard day's walkin' before ye to-morrow."

"I know—that's what I'm wondering about. You know I have no gun or anything, Mr. Harrigan."

"Did ye ever handle a gun?"

"No, sir, I don't think I ever had one in my hands."

"So I was thinkin' and ye'll do better without. There'll be nothin' fer ye to shoot anyway —nothin' that ye could shoot, I mean."

"But what will I do if I should meet a wild animal of some kind?"

"Ye'll meet nothin' bigger than a coyote—and ye'll meet no coyote if he sees ye first, which he's sure to do. But if it should happen that ye run onto one unexpected just heave a rock at him and tell him to get the hell out of yer way."

"Aren't they ever dangerous?"

"Coyotes do be harmless as canary birds. Now go to sleep like a good boy."

"Suppose I should break a leg or something, Mr. Harrigan?"

"An' why should ye break a leg or anything like that? All ye have to do is just to walk."

"But I might be bitten by a snake!"

"I've told ye what to do in that case. Av course ye might drop dead av heart failure before mornin'— But the chances are ye will not."

"What if I run out of water?"

"Ye'll carry enough to last ye to Blackwater Tanks and back. If ye should be such a fool as to waste it by takin' a bath, or if ye should mislay yer canteen ye ought to die of thirst, as ye probably will."

"Suppose I don't find Bruce and Colorado Bill at the Tanks."

"Then ye'll just come straight back here to

Drippin' Spring and from here ye'll follow the trail I showed ye to my place in the Biscuit Hills. 'Tis like I told ye, ye can't miss yer way to the Tanks because ye'll steer straight fer the little hollow between the two breasts of Mother Mountain. But, if by any mischance ye should not meet yer men on yer way to the Tanks, or ye should not find them there so that ye have to come back alone, then fer the love av God be careful to stick to the trail! It should be clear enough with Colorado Bill and his outfit just goin' over it, and yer own fresh tracks besides, but watch it every step ye take. If ye leave the way back here to Drippin' Spring and turn aside into Skeleton Sink ye may just make yer peace with God. There's nothin' but death in Skeleton Sink."

Again for a little while the silence of the desert night was unbroken. Then Pierre called softly, "Mr. Harrigan!"

"Yes, lad."

"Mr. Harrigan, do you believe that those we call dead can see us—I mean can they watch us like—like a person in a theater if she were standing in the wings could watch an actor on the stage?"

"'Tis like the priests tell us, I suppose."

"Well, I don't need any priest to tell me," returned Pierre. "I know. I can feel my mother watching me exactly as I used to feel her standing in the wings when I played my bits on the stage. And when I would get my cue to exit I would run off the stage straight into mother's arms, and she would say, 'Bravo, bravo, my little Pierre!' And just before mother died she made me understand that what we call death is only the exit of the actor from the stage.

"You see, Mr. Harrigan, an actor's exit is the most important thing he does. It doesn't matter so much how you enter—I mean, how you come into this world—whether you are born well and all that. It's the way you play the part that's assigned to you—it's how you go out of this world—it's your exit that really counts. It's just simply no use to make a good entrance in a great part if you're going to fall down at the finish. I mean, if you can't build your part up to the very last line, and make your exit a great one. That's what I've always thought I would do. I've always expected to play the part that was written for me so that when my cue came I could make my exit as I used to do when I

was a kid—with mother standing in the wings, and that I would hear her say, 'Bravo, bravo, my little Pierre!' "

In the darkness, the man of the desert crossed himself and muttered a prayer.

"But that's all over now, Mr. Harrigan. I've made a miserable mess of my part. I'm a rotten failure. I was cast to play the part of an actor —I mean, a real artist of the stage, and mother saved the money for me to go to school. All my life I have looked forward to it. Because everybody who knows anything at all about me knows, and I know deep down inside of me—that I was born to play that part—to be an actor. And then—then, you see, I gave my school money to Bruce, for him to put it into a gold mine out here in Nevada. If I hadn't done that, Bruce wouldn't have left Ann, and I wouldn't be away out here in this desert where I've no business to be. I don't belong here, Mr. Harrigan. I wasn't born for this sort of thing. I'm out of place here—I don't know what to do. I'm afraid—regular stage-fright, if you know what I mean. And I can feel that mother, there in the wings, is not happy to have me like this. I don't think I can make much of an exit now after the way I've failed to play

my part. The miserable soda jerk will just sneak off the stage anyway he can manage it—and the sooner the better. I don't think mother will say, 'Bravo, bravo, my little Pierre!' when I make my exit now, Mr. Harrigan."

"The saints keep us, what talk is this?" muttered Jimmie Harrigan to himself. Aloud he said, "Never mind, lad, it will be all right. Ye'll feel different when ye see the daylight to-morrow morning. Things always look black in the dark, ye know. Go to sleep now like a good boy."

From out of the mystery and the loneliness of the vast desert came a wild, weird cry.

"Mr. Harrigan," whispered Pierre. "Did you hear?"

"'Tis only a coyote, lad. Go to sleep, ye've talked enough."

"I—I think it might be better if I had a gun for to-morrow, Mr. Harrigan."

The cry came again—a long-drawn unearthly howl ending in a sobbing laugh.

"Mr. Harrigan, there it is again! Did you hear?"

"Go to sleep, lad, go to sleep."

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 2

JIMMIE HARRIGAN'S last word to Pierre that morning when the boy had set out alone from Dripping Spring was: "Keep yer eyes on Mother Mountain as ye would if she were yer own mother up there in the sky. Head straight fer the little hollow between her two breasts and ye'll never go amiss. And remember to stick close to the trail if by any mischance ye should have to come back alone. Ye'll be in no danger of strayin' into Skeleton Sink either goin' or comin' av ye do as I'm tellin' ye."

And the Irishman's heart had gone out to the boy in understanding appreciation when Pierre characteristically tried to hide his fears with a bit of burlesque acting. The man of the desert knew that the soda fountain clerk was terrified at the thought of going alone into that dreadful land. That the boy could force himself to undertake the adventure in spite of his terror won the old prospector's honest admiration.

Scarcely was Pierre beyond shouting distance from his friend when the loneliness and the silence of the land so oppressed him that he was almost overcome by an impulse to turn back. But with grim determination he fixed his eyes on Mother Mountain and forced himself to go on. He dared not halt for an instant; he dared not even turn his head to look back. An hour passed. Then he ventured to stop and look around. Far away to the southwest he could see a thin column of dust—Jimmie Harrigan and his burros! He watched until even that sign of another human being who shared with him the vast desert solitude, vanished. With a low cry he turned and drove himself on.

The sun climbed up the empty sky. The heat grew more and more intense; the silence and the desolation more appalling.

He went on.

As he walked with his eyes on that hollow between the breasts of Mother Mountain, memories of his mother with innumerable incidents from his childhood crowded his mind. The cruelties of those early years before his father disappeared; experiences from that period when he

and his mother were together on the stage; the way she used to stand in the wings to watch him, and to receive him when he made his exit; and then his beautiful companionship with her in Orchard Hill. Vividly, Pierre recalled that first meeting with his mother's old friend in their theater behind the willows in the pasture at the foot of the hill when, in his childish way, he had decided that the old actor should be his Father Tony. He could smell the flowers, the grass, the trees and cattle, and warm moist earth. Never in all the following years had Father Tony failed him. Vividly, too, he remembered that day when little Ann had first gone with them to their theater, and it had been decided that she should be Father Tony's little girl.

On the crest of a low ridge he paused to search the desert ahead with anxious eyes. Bruce and his companion were not in sight. There was nothing moving in that vast expanse.

He went on.

He lived again those months of his mother's illness, and thought of her dreams for him—that he was born to be a great artist of the stage —dreams in which he had shared—dreams that Father Tony had fostered—dreams that had gov-

erned all his life. He recalled his mother's talks about the art of the theater. He remembered her words when she spoke to him about her approaching death, and how after her exit she would stand in the wings to watch him act his part on the stage as she had always done when he was a little child. He called her name aloud. He wondered, was she watching him now from the wings? If he should make his exit somewhere in the desert would she be there to receive him? He recited bits from favorite plays. Over and over, he declaimed old Tony Latour's favorite lines: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." He imagined himself in a great theater acting before an immense audience, and spoke and moved as if he were playing a part in a great play. He remembered that Ann had said she would sit in a box and throw him a kiss.

With increasing anxiety, he watched for the men that Harrigan had been so confident he would meet.

He went on.

The sun hung high overhead in an empty white-hot sky.

He crouched in the shade of a rock and ate

a little food and drank sparingly from his canteen.

He went on.

The boy, Bruce Carey, came to share his Orchard Hill home and to be woven into the pattern of his life. As he pushed on deeper and deeper into the interminable desert to find Bruce, scenes from their boyhood together passed before him in swift review: Their first and only fight when, beside himself with rage because Bruce had spoken lightly of his mother, he had nearly killed the older boy with a stone. Incidents from their school days, and from the social life of Orchard Hill. Their rivalry for Ann; Bruce a bank clerk; the wedding; Ann as Bruce's wife. Incidents from his life as a soda fountain clerk. Incidents from that period when he made his home with Bruce and Ann. Again he lived that hour when his love for Ann had made him surrender his school money to Bruce. Once more he endured the agony of the realization that he could not now fulfill all that his mother and Father Tony and he had planned for his future. And again he felt the madness of that moment when he and Ann, looking into each other's eyes, had seen their love, and in that same instant had ruth-

lessly denied it. And Bruce had gone away and left Ann because of him. And now his love for Ann was driving him on to find her husband and take him back to her.

Surely here in this desert so terrible in its vast desolation—so empty of all life—surely here there was no reason why he should not speak aloud his love. He shouted, "Ann, Ann, Ann! I love you, Ann! I love you—love you—love you!" Every endearment that he had felt but never dared to put into words even in his secret thoughts he cried aloud now to the silent desert. And then, as if she walked beside him, he reassured her with promises that she should not be shamed in Orchard Hill through his love because he would bring her husband back; her father's innocence should be established, and everything would be as it was.

From the crest of every ridge and from every bit of high land he strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the men he hoped with every mile to meet.

The sun moved slowly down the empty sky; the shadows lengthened.

He went on, and on, and on.

He seemed to have been walking for ages.

Mother Mountain was as far away as when he first set out upon his endless journey. He looked back but could not tell the way he had come beyond a hundred yards of faintly marked trail.

The shadows deepened; dusk crept over the desert; night came.

Beside a tiny campfire he crouched staring into the darkness which shut him in, listening, listening in the awful silence—feeling in every taut nerve the menace of that lonely land.

The night was an eternity.

Pierre Donovan had no illusions about himself, nor was he given to that self-deception which so commonly marks small natures. His belief that he was born to be an actor was founded upon his mother's convictions and Antonio Latour's judgment. He modestly felt that he had, as he would have expressed it, something. But he was too intelligent and too well schooled by Old Tony not to know that the goal of his ambitious dreams was years away. He felt that for him to attain that goal was within the realm of the possible —that was all. In the meantime he was a soda jerk. He was aware that the good people of Orchard Hill laughed at him; that they refused to take him seriously; that his ambition to be a

great actor was the standing joke of the countryside; that he was held to be an irresponsible, impractical, worthless disciple of old Tony Latour's —all of which disturbed him not in the least. He had not pretended to Jimmie Harrigan that the desert did not frighten him. He made no attempt to deny his fears to himself. But there was a something within him which drove him on, in spite of his fear. Perhaps Old Tony was right when he said that Pierre Donovan was a great soul.

In the first gray light of the morning he went on.

With the coming of the sun his spirit was lifted. Mother Mountain had moved nearer during the night. He sang bits of comic songs. He felt confident that he would find Blackwater Tanks and Bruce.

He went on.

Again doubts and fears beset him. What if Bruce and his companion were not at Blackwater Tanks? What if they had perished of thirst and he should find their dead bodies? Dripping Spring seemed, now, an eternity away. He looked back but could not even be sure of the direction. As the man of the desert had said, there would

be no Mother Mountain to guide him on his way back. The Skeleton Peaks, too, were nearer and on his right lay the terrible Skeleton Sink. What if the wind should obliterate his trail? He carefully estimated the amount of water in his canteen and went on.

At last the long slope of Mother Mountain lay before him and he knew he must be near the Tanks.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 3

AS Jimmie Harrigan had explained to Pierre, the Blackwater Tanks were small natural hollows or basins in the rocks at the foot of Mother Mountain where, for uncertain periods of time following the infrequent desert rains, water might be found.

There were no signs of living springs or underground moisture anywhere in the vicinity—no trees or bushes or grass other than the usual sparse desert vegetation. The country round about, including the long sloping rise of Mother Mountain, was cut by arroyos and gulches, scarred with dykes and ledges—a jumble of various colored rocks spotted here and there with patches of thin, gravelly soil.

It was midday when the man, called Colorado Bill, and Bruce Carey, returned from their morning's work of prospecting to their camp in a sandy wash at the foot of a high overhanging cliff near the Tanks.

It was frightfully hot. Not a breath of air stirred over the vast expanse of desert and the two men showed the effect of their long hours of tramping over the burning slopes of the mountain. In the thin strip of shade afforded by the cliff they dropped their picks and in turn drank long and deep from a large cloth-covered canteen which hung from a small scrubby bush in a crevice in the wall. Then removing their hats and throwing aside the smaller empty canteens which they carried, they seated themselves wearily upon convenient rocks.

"Dad," said Bruce, "I've been thinking."

"You'd better not," returned Colorado. "You're liable to overheat yourself."

Disregarding the pleasantry, Bruce continued: "If that old boy who left his bones and a bag of gold in Skeleton Sink really made his rich strike in this neighborhood why didn't he mark out his claim with monuments of piled up rocks and a location notice as prospectors always do?"

"Prospectors don't always stake out their claims when they make a rich strike in some wild country like this," Colorado answered. "Sometimes a man will hide his find and hotfoot it to the settlement to tip off a few of his close friends

before he makes his discovery known generally. Then this bunch of insiders will stake out their claims together and help protect each other's interests when the big rush comes. In this case, it is generally believed that the fellow who made the strike didn't have time enough to do his locatin' on account of the water in the Tanks givin' out. He simply had to leave and leave in a hurry."

"As we'll have to do in the next day or two, I suppose," said Bruce moodily.

"I figure we can stay to-morrow," returned Colorado. "If we hadn't turned the burros adrift we couldn't have held out this long. About day after to-morrow mornin' we'll cache our outfit here and hit the trail for Dripping Spring. At the Spring we'll find our burros and make it back to Red Butte where we can lay up until it rains. Then, with another load of supplies, we'll come back here and be good for two or three months. While we are here, though, we'll sure hang on as long as we can, because you never can tell—we might find that rich lode the very last minute."

"Yeah, we *might,*" drawled Bruce hopelessly.

"Might!" retorted the other, "we *will!* There's not a doubt in the world about that rich vein of

gold bein' somewhere in this vicinity. All we've got to do is to keep on coverin' the ground systematically, like we're doin', and we're *sure* to find it."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Bruce. "I've listened to your pipe dreams until I'm sick."

Colorado Bill rose slowly to his feet. For a long minute he stood looking thoughtfully down at his companion who sat hunched in a dejected posture, holding his head in his hands. Then, moving with thoughtful deliberation, the older man went to the canteen and drank again. Standing with the canteen in his hands he again studied Bruce with speculative interest.

"Have a drink?" he said suddenly.

Bruce did not even raise his head. "No."

Hanging the canteen on the bush Colorado walked slowly back to stand over his disheartened companion.

"Look here, son," he said at last, "there's something the matter with you. What is it?"

Bruce stirred uneasily, but did not look up.

"I couldn't help it because that Painted Mountain prospect of mine pinched out, could I?" said the older man. "You ought to be damned glad that I found out it was no good before we sunk

all your money in it. This Mother Mountain lode is certain to pay big when we find it. I tell you, I've seen those samples that were found with that old prospector's bones—white quartz with big chunks and gobs of gold all through it. God, boy, think what it will mean when we strike it!"

Bruce leaped to his feet. "For Christ's sake, will you shut up!" he shouted. "You have raved about the millions we're going to have until I'm damned near crazy! When we strike it rich—when we strike it rich! All your life you have been going to strike it rich! The first thing I can remember as a kid was, you just about to make a fortune! Every theatrical company you ever had anything to do with started out to be the biggest box office success that was ever known. But did you, Roy Donovan, ever get within sight even of big money? No. We stuck with each show just long enough to get the wrinkles out of our bellies and you were off after another sure-fire winner.

"For months you've been nagging me to raise money enough to develop a mine that you knew positively was a bonanza, and when I land in Red Butte with the necessary cash you inform me that your bonanza has pinched out, and then you drag

me out here on this lost Mother Mountain lode proposition. We have about as much chance of finding this lost gold mine—if there ever was such a mine—as I had of finding a diamond mine in my dooryard back home. I'd give all the gold you'll ever get out of this damned desert if I was back in Orchard Hill right now with Ann and my job in the bank. I've made seventeen kinds of a fool out of myself following your billion dollar leads—that's what I've done!"

With the last word, he turned his back on his companion and strode angrily away.

Donovan (to call the man by his right name) went to their supply of provisions and began selecting cans of food for their midday meal.

Suddenly Bruce returned, half running, stumbling, staggering, his face haggard, his eyes wild with terror. With an inarticulate cry he sank down in a cowering heap on the rock where he had been sitting a few minutes before.

Donovan sprang to his side. "Bruce," he cried sharply, "what in hell is the matter with you?"

Bruce pointed a shaking hand in the direction from which he had come. "The water!" he cried hoarsely, "it's—it's gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, there's hardly a spoonful left in the last big basin!"

"Hell!" said Donovan. "I thought it would surely last through to-morrow."

"But what will we do?"

"Do? Why, we'll head for Dripping Spring right now. I'll make up a couple of packs of grub to last us back to Red Butte." As he spoke he went back to their stores.

The older man's coolness served to steady his less experienced companion and while Donovan was busy with the provisions Bruce went to the canteen. He had unscrewed the cap and was raising the canteen to his lips when Donovan saw him. With a yell, Donovan leaped forward and literally tore the canteen from Bruce's grasp.

"What in God's name do you think you're doing?" demanded Donovan. "Are you stark mad?"

"I was only having a drink," returned Bruce angrily.

"Only having a drink? You poor, crazy fool!" He shook the canteen, anxiously estimating its contents. "There's barely water enough left now to get one man to Dripping Spring," he said

slowly, "and it's got to do for us two. Do you understand? From now on I'll take charge of this. You'll get a drink when I give it to you, and I promise you that it will be damned little at a time and as long as you can keep on your feet between times."

"Oh, is that so!" retorted Bruce sullenly.

Donovan put the canteen carefully down close to his hand as he made up the packs of food which they must carry. After watching his companion for a minute, Bruce again seated himself on the rock and bowed his head in his hands.

"Come on," called Donovan presently. "Get a move on, will you? Here's your share of the grub. We've got to get out of here." He swung the small bundle of provisions over his shoulder and picked up the canteen. Bruce did not move.

Pierre was making his way up a long sandy wash toward the hollow between Mother Mountain's breasts when suddenly he heard, or fancied that he heard, a human voice. He stopped and listened. His heart beat so loudly that he could hear nothing else. He restrained an impulse to shout and went on.

The sound of voices came again—louder. He was sure now. He was about to rush forward but checked himself. The voices were angry. It might not be Bruce and the man called Colorado Bill. It would be better to make sure before revealing his presence.

His feet on the sandy floor of the wash made no sound as he moved cautiously toward the point from which the voices came. As he drew nearer he heard more and more distinctly. Then he was quite near—only a low dyke or wall of rock scarcely higher than his head hid the speakers. He could hear clearly now, every word. One voice he knew—it was Bruce. The other voice was strange. He was about to make his presence known when the stranger spoke again and something made him hesitate.

Donovan was looking at his companion curiously. "Well," he said at last, "you're not thinking of staying here, are you?"

"I'm not going back to Red Butte."

The agony of fear that was revealed in the man's haggard and twitching features told Donovan more than the words, that his companion was facing a desperate issue.

Behind the dyke of rock, Pierre heard in

Bruce's voice all that Donovan saw in the bank clerk's face.

Deliberately, as if he sought by his manner to steady the younger man, Donovan lowered his pack to the ground, put the canteen carefully down, and moving leisurely to a seat near Bruce, began to roll a cigarette.

Pierre held his place—he could not move.

Bruce, with a little more assurance, asked, "Didn't you say there was a way we could go from here to Gold Center?"

Donovan answered calmly, "We haven't enough water to last one of us half way to Gold Center."

"Well, we're going to Gold Center just the same," returned Bruce with sullen, unreasoning stubbornness.

Donovan, watching his companion, asked calmly: "And what are we going to do when we get to Gold Center?"

"We're going to get another outfit with a supply of provisions and go prospecting again. There must be some place in this desert where a man can live."

"So *that's* it!" said Donovan. "I thought when you told me to call you Fred Burnes that there was something wrong."

"What are you going under the name of Colorado Bill for?" flashed Bruce angrily.

"Keep your shirt on, son," returned Donovan coolly. "I read about that Orchard Hill bank affair in the paper the morning we left Red Butte. You thought when you used the paper to start our campfire with that night, that I hadn't seen it but I had. And it wasn't hard to guess why you wanted to be called Burnes. That's why I told Jimmie Harrigan at Dripping Spring that we were going to my claim in the Painted Mountains. I turned our burros loose for a blind, figuring that we'd get away from here while there was still enough water, and that we'd manage to pull through to Gold Center somehow—making it look like we'd wandered off in the desert somewhere and died. The longer we stayed here leaving a show like we were simply prospecting, providing we didn't stay too long, the better it would look. I miscalculated, that's all—cut it a little too fine. With no more water than we have now we can't go anywhere but back to Dripping Spring, which means Red Butte because we can't carry enough grub to last us more than three or four days."

"But why didn't you tell me that you knew?" cried Bruce.

"I knew you would talk when you got in the proper frame of mind," returned Donovan. "There wasn't any need for me to rush you. How did you make your getaway from Orchard Hill anyhow? Maybe they haven't succeeded in locating you in Red Butte yet—we might manage to get back there and get away again."

"I never killed Campbell," said Bruce, "that is —I mean, I never meant to."

"No? But you got the money all right, didn't you?"

"I didn't get it from the bank."

"You didn't?"

"No—I got it from Campbell, the cashier."

"Look here, Bruce, without wasting too much time, suppose you tell me just what happened from the start?"

"I had to go to Camden that night to deliver some papers from our bank to Mr. Fuller, the president of the Camden bank. Pierre was all ready to go to New York to school, but at the last minute I persuaded him to let me have his school money to invest in this wonderful mine that you had been writing me about."

"All right, go on."

"Well, I'd already made up my mind that if I could get that money from Pierre I would cut loose from the whole works at Orchard Hill and come out here and join you. So when Pierre turned his money over to me, just a few minutes before I left to catch my train to Camden, I saw my chance to make a clean break. I left a letter for Ann, telling her that I was through for good.

"Ann's father had to go down to the bank to work on his books that evening, and when I went to the train we walked as far as the bank together. At the side door of the bank we said good-by. Martin went into the back. I started on toward the depot. I had only gone a little way when I suddenly remembered that I had nearly two hundred dollars in the bank and wished I had it. You see, Pierre's money was not nearly as much as you said we would need. I looked at my watch and saw I had plenty of time, so I hustled back. As I was unlocking the door I saw something shining on the sidewalk close to the threshold. I picked it up and it was a Masonic watch charm. Of course I knew it was Martin's and I didn't even put it in my pocket thinking that in another minute I would hand it to the old man.

"That side entrance to the bank opens into a hall, or entry like; on one side is the big main room; on the other the offices of the president and the cashier. As I passed the cashier's office I noticed the door was open about an inch, and that the light was on. I thought it was funny that Martin should be in there and pushed the door wide open. There was Campbell, our cashier, just about to put a package of money into a small grip which stood on his desk. When he saw me he sort of crouched for a second, and I knew by his look and his actions what he was up to. He was getting away with a bunch of the bank's cash and I had caught him in the act. Didn't either of us say a word—then he jumped me. In the tussle, which only lasted a second, I managed to throw him on his side and back across one corner of a heavy table in the center of the room. He hit it pretty hard with his weight and me throwing him, and I guess it must have hurt his back. Anyway he went on down to the floor and as he fell his head hit on the foot of the big swivel chair in front of his desk—you know how the base of a swivel chair is? I saw he was knocked clean out, but I never dreamed he was hurt bad. It was all over in a few seconds and I

guess Martin must have been in the vault getting out his books because he evidently hadn't heard a thing, and from behind the counter where Martin worked he couldn't see the door of the cashier's office. I realized the situation in a flash. There was that bundle of money! I didn't stop to think it out, I just grabbed the money, slipped out of the door and away to the depot just in time to catch my train to Camden.

"In Camden, I delivered the papers to Mr. Fuller and went to the hotel and registered in case there should be a call for me on the phone. Then I went to the depot and bought a ticket to Buffalo—it was just about time for the east bound train. But I didn't go on that train; I struck out on foot across country fourteen miles to Wheeler, a fairly good-sized town on another railroad. I didn't buy a ticket but boarded the train the last minute and paid my fare to a junction point where I got off and caught a train to Cleveland. From Cleveland I went to Denver, and from Denver to Red Butte.

"I never even knew the cashier was dead until I read the story in the paper. It was too late then for me to back out because I *had* gotten away with the money. Figure it out for yourself—

what would you have done? I hate like hell to think of poor old Dad Martin being thrown in jail for something he had no more to do with than you. But what can I do? It's him or me. You see, having Martin's Masonic charm in my hand when Campbell jumped me, I dropped it in the tussle and never once thought of it again."

"How much did you get away with?"

"Twenty-five thousand."

"Got it on you?"

"Of course. You see, I already had the money I got from Pierre. I paid my expenses out of that."

"Hum-m," said Donovan, and lapsed into deep thought.

Bruce Carey's mental and nervous condition was pitiable. In his recital of the events which had led to the terrifying situation in which he now found himself he had lived again, as it were, every hour of mental agony which he had endured from the moment when he had tricked Pierre out of his school money to his discovery that Donovan had known all the time of that tragedy at the bank. The nervous strain had been cumulative. Fear, remorse, apprehension, uncertainty, had assailed him with almost hourly increasing strength.

Step by step the net of circumstances had been drawn about him. Helpless to avert the impending horror he had felt that net closing. And now the inevitable crisis! The dangers that faced him whichever way he turned, and between which he must choose, were appalling. Another touch and the poor ambitious bank clerk would become a desperate animal ready to kill or to be killed with wild unreasoning fury.

"Well, what are we going to do?" he demanded at last.

"What would *you* suggest?" asked Donovan with grim humor.

"We've got to go some place where I can lay low until this damned Orchard Hill bank affair blows over."

"Exactly. Once your innocent father-in-law is convicted and hung you'll be safe, heh?"

"What else can I do?" snarled Bruce. "It's him or me, ain't it?"

Donovan rose to his feet. "Come on. We've spent more time now with this palaver than we had any right to." He started toward the packs and the canteen.

"Where are we going?" cried Bruce leaping to his feet.

"To Dripping Spring first, then to Red Butte."

"Not me!" shouted the other furiously. "You'll never get me back to Red Butte to be arrested for murder." He glared defiantly at the older man.

Donovan, as one whose patience is exhausted, replied sharply: "I tell you that there is no other place this side of hell that we can possibly go. There's your pack—we're heading for Dripping Spring right now."

"I tell you I'm not going back to Red Butte," cried Bruce. "I've taken all the orders I'm going to take from you. You got me into this damned mess with your fine promises about a mine that pinched out before I could get to it. And you led me out here on this wild goose chase after an imaginary lode where there's no water. You ought to have known the Tanks would be dry this time of the year—you're supposed to know this country—I'm not. You've engineered everything; I followed your lead every step. It was you that got us caught here without water; you're to blame and now you can take the consequences." He ran to the canteen and stood over it like a wild beast at bay.

Donovan spoke with deadly calmness, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to take this canteen and some provisions and head for Gold Center. You can go along with me or you can go to the devil!"

There was menace in Donovan's voice now—deliberate and deadly. "So you would ditch me here in the desert, would you? You'd go on with all of the water and your twenty-five thousand and leave me to die? I guess you would at that—it doesn't seem to bother you much, leaving your wife's father to die for a crime that you committed!"

Bruce stooped and took up the canteen.

"Drop it!" snapped Donovan, and as he spoke his hand went to the gun at his hip.

In a spirit of mad bravado Bruce unscrewed the cap of the canteen. "You had the last drink," he said, "it's my turn now."

"Drop it, I tell you!" Donovan's gun was in his hand now.

In that same instant, behind Donovan, Pierre appeared, climbing over the low wall or dyke of rock. Donovan's attention was so centered upon Bruce that he was unaware of the entrance of a third actor on the scene. But Bruce saw.

Pierre's eyes were wide, his face was distorted with horror. He crouched on the rock with every muscle tense and straining while sheer terror for the moment held him motionless.

Who shall attempt to say what thoughts flashed through the tortured brain of Bruce Carey at this sudden and dramatic development of the situation? Did he feel relief—believing that Pierre had arrived in the nick of time to save him? Did he consider Pierre an additional danger? Did he think that whatever the final outcome, Donovan would not dare to do the thing which he so plainly threatened? Was he confident that Pierre would stop Donovan in time? Or did he, in despair, deliberately move to end his own torment by taunting the man with the gun to the point of killing?

With an insane laugh, Bruce defiantly lifted the canteen to his lips.

Pierre tried to shout but no sound issued from his throat. He could not move—he was held as in a vise. He knew that Bruce saw him and wondered why he showed no surprise. As Bruce lifted the canteen toward his lips he saw the other man deliberately bring his gun up into position. Suddenly whatever it was that held him let go.

He slipped his pack and canteen from his shoulders, and with no conscious muscular effort he threw himself upon the man who was about to kill. The roar of the gun was in his ears even as his weight and the fury of his attack bore the one who had fired it to the ground. The gun itself fell several feet away. Bruce, with a spasmodic jerk, twisted half around, the canteen fell from his hand, and the bank clerk went down in a writhing heap.

While the two men who knew not that they were father and son were locked in a desperate struggle, Bruce Carey died. And the canteen, lying unheeded where it had fallen, emptied its precious contents into the desert sand.

The good villagers of Orchard Hill, had they been privileged to witness that combat, would have said that this young man who fought his desperate antagonist with such unfaltering courage was a new Pierre Donovan. And, in a way, the villagers would have been right because Orchard Hill had never known the real Pierre Donovan at all. Orchard Hill had known a gentle, imaginative lad who was dubbed by the younger Orchard Hill "fraidy-cat" and "mamma's boy" and "sissy." They had known a soda foun-

tain clerk who amused them with his antics and who, as a would-be actor, was the joke of the community. But Orchard Hill never dreamed that a Pierre Donovan whom they did not know was merely acting these parts much as he dreamed of acting, some day, on the stage. In short, Orchard Hill had mistaken the character presented by the actor for the character of the actor himself. A mistake, by the way, which is not at all uncommon to those who too carelessly judge their fellows.

But this was not a new Pierre Donovan—it was the same Pierre—the Pierre that his mother, Harriet Noël, and old Antonio Latour knew—acting a different rôle which he had suddenly been called upon to play.

And Pierre, himself, was conscious of this sudden change in characters. All the while he had been playing the soda fountain clerk in Orchard Hill he knew that the soda jerk was not his real self. He had not thought highly of that soda jerk who was so afraid in the desert; he had not admired the character; he had not enjoyed the part. And in that moment when he looked upon the scene which was being enacted by Bruce, and that other man, and felt the impending tragedy,

he had known that he must now play another part. In the same instant Pierre Donovan stepped out of the character of a country village soda jerk to enter upon this scene in a new rôle. The frightened soda jerk was left, as it were, to perish miserably in the desert, but Pierre Donovan, Harriet Noël's son, lived. And Harriet Noël's son had seen clearly this new part which he was to play; he had visualized the character he must enact, and he had thrown himself into this new rôle with all the genius and greatness of his artist soul—the soul that Old Tony says he inherited from his actress mother.

This character which Pierre now played had no sense of fear. In one lightning-like flash he had seen Bruce drop the canteen and fall. He knew that this man with whom he fought was trying now to kill him, but he was not afraid. In a cold fury, with a strength which was more than merely physical, and with his brain working calmly as if he were rehearsing a part in a play, he fought to gain the mastery of this one who sought his life. More than once he felt himself perilously near defeat. Still he was not afraid. The pace was terrific. It could not last long. The clean bodily strength and endurance of the

younger man began to tell. Pierre saw fear come into the eyes of his nearly exhausted opponent. Then the end.

For a moment Pierre stood over the man who lay unconscious at his feet. Then he ran to Bruce.

Kneeling beside the body he tried desperately to discover some sign of life. When he could not he still knelt there as if he too had received a mortal hurt.

He raised his head and looked about wonderingly at Mother Mountain rising into the sky; at the rocks; the patches of sandy soil; the thinly scattered, stunted desert vegetation. He looked at the canteen lying on its side and the dark moist spot on the ground which the water had made. Then he saw something else.

The man he knew as Colorado Bill was creeping toward that gun which lay some distance away where it had fallen at the beginning of their struggle.

Pierre leaped to his feet. The other made a desperate effort but even as his fingers touched the weapon a smashing blow from Pierre stretched him again unconscious on the ground.

This time when the man regained his senses he

saw Pierre sitting calmly on a rock with the gun in his hand, watching.

For a long minute they looked at each other without a word, then the man, getting to his feet, spoke: "Who are you?"

"I came to take Bruce back to Ann," said Pierre calmly. "You have killed him."

"He was going to leave me here in the desert without water," returned the other. "I shot him in self-defense."

Pierre pointed to the canteen and the dark moist spot on the ground. "You see what happened?"

"Yes," said the other, "I see."

"I was behind the rock there," said Pierre, "and I heard Bruce tell you about the bank money and the cashier. It is better that Bruce should go like this, I guess, than that he should be taken back home to prison, or to be hung for murder—better for him and better for Ann. You are the man who got Bruce so interested in a gold mine out here, I suppose?"

"For God's sake, who are you?"

"I'm Pierre Donovan."

"Pierre, Pierre Donovan!"

"Yes," said Pierre. "I came to find Bruce and

take him back to Ann. He went away and left Ann because he thought she was having a love affair with some one else. I did not know about this other thing. Ann doesn't know about it either. I can't take Bruce home now." He paused and looked toward the dead man. Then he added: "But I can take you to Red Butte and turn you over to the law for this murder. And I am going to take the money back to the bank —and get Ann's father out of jail."

"So you are Pierre Donovan?"

"Yes, I am Pierre Donovan. You are Colorado Bill, I suppose?"

"Have you any water?" the man asked suddenly.

"Yes, a little. Not enough for two, but we must make it do. We must start back to Dripping Spring at once." Again he looked toward the dead man as if considering what to do.

"I only gave him what he deserved," said the other. "You heard how he was leaving his wife's father—an innocent man—to hang or go to prison for life. Besides I shot him in self-defense, just as you or any one else would have done. If I were to try to get away with all

the water and leave you to die in the desert you would kill me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Pierre grimly. "If you try anything like that I shall kill you."

"Well, then, why accuse me of murder?"

"You got Bruce into this. If it hadn't been for you and your talk about the millions he could make in this mine of yours if he only could get hold of a little capital to start, Bruce would never have thought of leaving Ann or taking that bank money or doing anything like that. You murdered Bruce Carey when you made him money-mad, and I'm going to see that you hang for it. I owe it to Ann."

"You won't help Ann that way. If you turn this money back to the bank, you'll have to tell how you got it, won't you?"

"I'll have to tell them something, I suppose."

"Yes, and if you turn me over to the sheriff in Red Butte I'll tell how Bruce Carey murdered the cashier, and was going to let his wife's innocent father be hung for his crime. I don't think it will make Ann any happier to know that her husband was a thief and a murderer, and that he was ready to let her own father be hung in order to cover up his crimes."

Pierre arose and, keeping his eye on his companion, and his weapon ready, moved to Bruce's body. While the other watched he carefully searched the dead man's clothing, transferring everything that he found to his own pockets. This done he stood gazing down at the still form on the ground as if lost in thought.

The other man moved a stealthy step nearer and instantly found himself covered by the gun in Pierre's steady hand.

"Don't make that mistake again," said Pierre sharply. "Get your pack—we're going."

The man was moving to obey when Pierre spoke again.

"No, get your pick and shovel first. I can't leave Bruce like this. I couldn't tell Ann that we did not even bury him. You must dig a grave. Dig it there." He pointed to a spot a few feet away. "That odd-shaped rock will mark it."

"Dig a grave!" the other exclaimed looking at Pierre as if that young man had suddenly lost his mind. "I'll be damned if I'll do any such fool thing."

"You'll die if you don't," Pierre retorted coolly, raising his weapon.

"But think of the unnecessary exertion in this heat!" protested the other. "Short of water as we are, you're crazy to think of such a waste of strength and time. We'll do well if we last to make Dripping Spring as it is!"

As well might the man have protested to an inanimate machine, or argued with a granite statue. Pierre Donovan unmoved by his protests forced him to do his bidding. Nor did the younger man relax his watchfulness for an instant. While the other toiled with pick and shovel, Pierre sat some fifty feet away on guard.

It was a gruesome scene—the desolate surroundings, the dead body, the murderer forced by the fear of death to dig a grave for his victim; the outwardly impassive and implacable watcher with his weapon ready for instant use.

The man's task was perhaps half completed when suddenly with a startled cry he threw aside his pick and went down on his knees.

Pierre, thinking the man's action a ruse to throw him off his guard, did not move.

The man sprang to his feet and seizing his pick used it for a minute with fierce energy. Again he cast the implement aside and half disappeared in the grave. An instant later he arose.

In his hands was a large piece of white quartz. His face was the face of one beside himself with wild excitement.

"I've found it!" he yelled, waving his arms. "I've found it! Great God! To think that it was right here all the time! We've been walking over it—we've been sleeping over it—we've made our fires and cooked our grub over it." He roared with laughter; he danced a wild jig; he threw his hat in the air; he yelled and waved his arms; he shouted wild oaths; he was mad with triumphant joy.

And all the time Pierre sat unmoved in watchful readiness.

"Come here, boy," cried the man, "come here and see!"

"I'm not interested," Pierre returned coldly, still thinking the man's actions a trick to throw him off his guard and entice him within reach. "Go on with your digging!"

For a minute the man looked at Pierre dumbly —he had forgotten the situation. Then he roared with laughter. "Go on with my digging!" he shouted. "I'll say I'll go on with my digging! You poor fish! I've struck the lost Mother Mountain lode!"

"You're wasting your energy," said Pierre. "Go ahead and finish the grave so we can be on our way."

The man gazed at Pierre as if dumfounded that any one could be so stupid. Then he said sarcastically, "I suppose you know gold when you see it!" and tossed a piece of the white quartz so that it fell at the young man's feet.

Pierre did not even stoop to pick up the piece of quartz. "I tell you I am not interested," he said. "Go on with your digging."

"Do you realize what this strike means?" cried the other. "Do you realize that there's millions in this vein; that it's undoubtedly the richest lode ever discovered? Are you human or are you a bloodless dummy?"

"I used to feel things," said Pierre. "I guess I'm dead—I'm sure that something in me is dead."

The other was quick to take advantage of what seemed to be a change in Pierre's mood. "I think I know what you mean, boy," he said in a tone of kindly sympathy. "But listen, with a hundredth part of the wealth that's right here under our feet you could—you could build the most

beautiful theater in the world to the memory of your mother."

Pierre started. "What do you know of my mother?"

"I know what Bruce told me," the other answered gently. "She was Harriet Noël. I remember seeing her on the stage once. I saw you, too, when you were a little chap. Didn't she used to stand in the wings while you were acting your kiddie parts? And didn't she always say that you would grow up to be a great actor?"

The very unexpectedness of this assault upon his emotions threw Pierre momentarily off his guard. The other seeing the opening gained by his cunning moved to make the most of it. But Pierre leaped to his feet, on guard again. The man stopped, but smiled as one, who knowing that the cards in his hand insure the final outcome of the game, might smile at his opponent's success in taking one trick.

"To hell with your gold!" cried Pierre with passionate earnestness. "Look what your talk of gold has done for poor Bruce there! Look what it has done for Martin Bevis! Look what it has done for Ann! Look what it has done for me! Anything that I could do with this gold

as a memorial to my mother would be an insult to her."

"All right," returned the other calmly. "But I'm not going to turn my back on these millions here so easily. I'm going to put up a location notice on this strike if you kill me while I'm doing it."

As he spoke he took from his pocket book a printed form and with a stub of a pencil proceeded to fill it in while Pierre, disconcerted by the man's confident manner and by the feeling that there was something back of it which he did not understand, watched him.

"There!" he said, when he had finished writing. "I have located this lode in your name, Bruce's and mine. I've put Bruce in so that his wife could have his share. You can see that she gets it. You and Ann together own control—I take only one-third.

"Suppose you succeed in getting me to Red Butte and turning me over to the sheriff? That won't bring Bruce back or do away with the fact that he was a thief and murderer. I say that for Ann's sake we ought never to let her know how her husband died, or that he was guilty of that bank crime and was planning to let her father

suffer for it. For her to know would be worse than murder. We will report that you and Bruce and I were together when we struck this lode; and that when we were on our way back to Dripping Spring Bruce wandered off the trail into Skeleton Sink and we never saw him again. We'll say it was impossible for us to go after him because we were so short of water that we barely made it to the Spring ourselves. That story will go without question. With the fortune we have here we'll find a way to clear Ann's father. We'll put the best detectives in the world to digging into that cashier's affairs; we'll plant that missing bank money some place where it will turn up in a way to prove that Martin couldn't have taken it. We'll hire the greatest lawyers in the country. It will all be easy enough with these millions to help us."

Holding out the location notice the man approached Pierre. "Here," he said, "look this over while I fix up a monument for it."

Pierre, keeping him covered, took the paper from his hands and wondered uneasily at the triumphant smile on the man's face as the latter withdrew again.

Still smiling and covertly watching Pierre he

began piling up a little monument of rocks such as prospectors use to mark their claims.

Pierre looked at the location notice: "Bruce Carey, Pierre Donovan, Roy Donovan."

"Roy Donovan—Roy Donovan!" Pierre rose slowly to his feet.

The other man faced him with a triumphant laugh. "Well, son, it's been a long time since we met."

"Are you Roy Donovan?"

"Surest thing you know, kid."

"My—my father?"

Roy Donovan laughed again. "That's another card in our little game, heh, kid? I somehow can't quite see Harriet Noël's boy turning his own father over to hang for murder, can you?"

The location notice fell from Pierre's hand. With bowed head and drooping shoulders he turned his back on his companion and moved listlessly toward the spot where he had left his canteen and pack.

Roy Donovan followed stealthily, step by step.

Dropping his gun, Pierre swung the pack over his shoulder and picked up the canteen. But with the canteen in his hand he paused and suddenly as if his strength were not equal to the anguish

EXIT

of the situation he leaned heavily against the low, rocky wall, his face hidden in his arms.

The older man, moving swiftly, silently reached the gun. Another instant and the weapon was in his hand.

CURTAIN

ACT III

THE sheriff's office in the County Courthouse at Red Butte was a large dingy room with a high counter-desk enclosing a space in one corner which afforded a degree of privacy to the safe and the under-sheriff's desk. There was a door leading into the jail, and other doors leading to the sheriff's private office and to the main corridor of the building and the street. The furniture of the room consisted of a number of very plain wooden-bottomed chairs, several cuspidors of no mean capacity, and a water-cooler of generous proportions.

Sheriff Billings, entering his office, greeted the under-sheriff, who was at his desk, with a cheery "Mornin', Pete."

"Good morning, Sheriff."

"Goin' to be another scorcher to-day," commented the sheriff, helping himself to a drink from the water-cooler.

"Sure is," agreed Pete.

The other continued, "If we don't get some

rain before long the country will just naturally dry up and blow away."

He stepped through the door of his private office to return an instant later without his hat. "Any word from Dripping Spring, Pete?"

"Not yet. Hank and Jeff should be comin' in to report any time now. They are due back this mornin' even if they had to go all the way to Blackwater Tanks."

"Yeah. They'd be ridin' nights this weather."

"Will and Stub have the easy end of this job. Autos beat horses."

"You mean some autos beat some horses sometimes."

The under-sheriff laughed. "Well, anyway, Will and Stub ought to be rollin' in pretty soon now, if they picked those men up anywhere between here and Gold Center. I can't believe though that Colorado Bill would be fool enough to try to go from the Tanks at Mother Mountain to Gold Center as dry and hot as it is right now."

"You never can tell. I reckon this lad who went out with Jimmie Harrigan is the one that Orchard Hill sheriff's telegram calls Pierre Donovan all right. I was talking to Kid Cameron

about him. Kid brought him over from the station. Seems to be a nice boy, Kid says."

"Jimmie Harrigan must have taken to him. If that old desert rat hadn't liked him he'd a-seen him fryin' in hell before he'd a-guided him to Drippin' Spring or anywhere else."

The sheriff laughed. "That little old Irishman is as square as they make them though."

"I'd hate to suggest that he wasn't!" chuckled the other. "Hello, Charlie!" The greeting was addressed to a man who at that moment entered the office with Antonio Latour and Ann Carey.

Charlie addressed the sheriff: "These people came in on the stage from Red Butte station this mornin'. They've been inquirin' after two fellers named Bruce Carey and Pierre Donovan. I told them mebby you could give 'em some information." He turned to Old Tony and Ann: "This is Sheriff Billings."

Ann started and drew back fearfully. The old actor, with an air of impressive dignity, bowed to the sheriff. Then turning to the man who had brought them to the office he demanded: "What does this mean, sir? Why have you brought us here? Are—are you an officer?"

Charlie grinned. "Just a deputy, that's all."

"Sit down, folks," said the sheriff kindly.

Ann dropped wearily into a chair. But Old Tony remained on his feet. "Does this mean, sir— Is it possible that by any mischance we are under arrest?"

"Oh, no," returned the sheriff, "not exactly. But perhaps you had better tell us who you are and what brings you to Red Butte."

Reassured by the sheriff's kindly manner, Old Tony relaxed and seated himself in a chair beside Ann.

"This is Mrs. Bruce Carey. I am Antonio Latour. We—ah—we expected to meet Mrs. Carey's husband here in Red Butte. But there seems to be some mistake; Mr. Carey is not here."

Ann cried anxiously, "And Pierre, too, Father Tony." To the sheriff she added eagerly: "Do you know, sir, if a young man named Pierre Donovan has been here lately?"

At this moment the telephone rang. The undersheriff answered, and while the others continued he received a message which he wrote down as it came to him over the wire.

"Yes, ma'am," said the sheriff, "Pierre Donovan has been here. Also your husband, Bruce

Carey—that is to say, we *think* that a man who calls himself Fred Burnes is Bruce Carey."

The under-sheriff from behind the counter-desk handed the message which he had written to Charlie, who passed it on to the sheriff. When the sheriff had read the message he looked at Ann and Old Tony thoughtfully. At last he said, "This telegram from Orchard Hill will interest you, Mrs. Carey and Mr. Latour." He read the message.

Orchard Hill, Ohio.

To Sheriff Billings,
Red Butte, Nevada.

Mrs. Bruce Carey, Ann, twenty-three, five foot four, weight one hundred thirty, brown eyes, brown hair. Antonio Latour, about sixty, height five foot ten, weight one hundred forty. Smooth shaven, faded blue eyes, white hair, actor. If these parties appear in your county hold them and notify me.

BOLTON, Sheriff.

"Oh, but you can't," cried Ann. "We haven't done anything wrong. We can't be arrested for nothing."

"That telegram, sir, is an outrage!" said Old Tony. He patted Ann's hand reassuringly. "Don't be alarmed, my dear. This ridiculous order will never be carried out. I shall see to

that. It is preposterous! It is like everything that silly ass of a sheriff in Orchard Hill has done from that first evening when he arrested your father."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Carey," said the sheriff. "Suppose you tell me the whole story. I'd be mighty glad to help you if I can."

"I think that would be best, Ann," agreed Old Tony.

"Where shall I begin?"

"Suppose you begin with the disappearance of your husband," said the sheriff. "I know the main facts of the affair at the bank, and the arrest of your father. I thought it was established beyond doubt that Bruce Carey was in Camden when the crime was committed?"

"Yes, sir, it was. Bruce was delivering some papers to the president of the Camden bank."

"Then why didn't he come back home to Orchard Hill?"

"Why, sir, Bruce didn't even *know* about what had happened at the bank when he went away. His going away was all settled and planned before anything *could* have happened at the bank. He—he left a letter about it—about his going away, I mean."

"Who has this letter?"

"I have."

"Haven't you shown this letter to the authorities?"

"Oh, no, sir. I couldn't. Nobody but Father Tony and Pierre and I know about Bruce's reasons for going away. I simply couldn't let Orchard Hill know. I—I would die of shame. And Pierre—it would be terrible for Pierre. It would be just as bad for Bruce too when he comes back. We could never live such a thing down—not in Orchard Hill. It was all such a horrible mistake—Bruce's going away, I mean. It would have been bad enough any time, but for him to disappear, for a reason that we dared not let anybody know about, the very night the bank—"

"I see," said the sheriff. "And when Bruce didn't show up at home the morning after the crime the officers began hunting him in spite of his alibi. Of course they would."

"Yes, sir. And Father Tony and Pierre and I thought if Bruce could only come home of his own free will, before the officers found him, that everything would be all right—and nobody would ever need to know the reason for his going away,

as they would have to know if he were arrested and brought back in connection with the bank."

"You were right in that, Mrs. Carey. But it would have been better if you had told the authorities why your husband disappeared."

"We could never have gone on living in Orchard Hill if I had. And wouldn't the officers have arrested him and brought him back for the bank just the same? Besides, it—it wouldn't have been fair to Pierre."

"Pierre?"

"Yes, sir."

The sheriff glanced at the telegram in his hand.

"Who is this man, Pierre Donovan?"

Ann looked appealingly at Old Tony.

"Pierre Donovan, sir," the old actor spoke impressively, as if referring to a personage of more than ordinary importance, "Pierre Donovan is the son of one Roy Donovan and Harriet Noël, his wife. Harriet Noël was one of the greatest actresses of her day. She died when her son was only a child and I had the honor to be appointed by her as the sole executor of her will and the legal guardian of her son. Pierre is destined to be as great an artist of the stage as was his mother."

"His home is in Orchard Hill, is it?"

"Pierre made his home with Mr. and Mrs. Carey. These three young people, sir, grew up together in Orchard Hill."

"This man is an actor, you say?"

"Pierre Donovan, sir, was born to be an actor. His earliest memories are of the theater—when he was on the stage in child parts with his mother. He grew to manhood in the atmosphere of the theater—so far as it was possible for me to create such an atmosphere for him in Orchard Hill. He has been reared in the best traditions and ideals of dramatic art. He was about to begin his life work by enrolling in the American Academy of Dramatic Art when suddenly this unfortunate situation developed."

"And so this man, Pierre, lived with you and your husband, Mrs. Carey?"

Poor Ann's reply was scarcely audible. "Yes, sir."

"And did he work in the bank, too, with your father and your husband?"

"Oh, no, sir. Pierre worked in the Owl Drug Store. He was a soda fountain clerk."

"What did you mean, Mrs. Carey, when you said just now that you couldn't tell why your hus-

band went away because it wouldn't be fair to your soda fountain actor friend?"

Again Ann turned to Old Tony appealingly. "Must I tell him, Father Tony?"

"I'm afraid you must, Ann."

The sheriff waited.

At last Ann managed to speak.

"Bruce thought that Pierre and I were in love with each other—I mean—in a way that we had no right to be. In the letter he left for me he said that I had been untrue to him, and that was why he was leaving me and was never coming back. Don't you see, sir, why I couldn't let anybody know that Bruce had left me for such a reason as that? Don't you see how unfair it would have been to Pierre?"

"Pierre knew why your husband left you, did he?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Pierre and Father Tony read the letter after the officers took father away. And we decided it would be best not to mention the letter to any one—and that Pierre must go and find Bruce and bring him back home before the officers could arrest him for the bank trouble."

"What made you think that Bruce might be in these parts?"

"Because Pierre's father, who deserted Pierre and his mother when Pierre was a little boy, wrote Bruce about a wonderful gold mine out here, and wanted Bruce to get money to put in it."

"And did Bruce get money to invest in this mine?"

Ann answered this question with womanly indignation as she remembered how Bruce had taken Pierre's money.

"Yes, sir, he did. He persuaded Pierre to let him have his school money. But Pierre doesn't know that it is his father who has this mine. Pierre's father wasn't good to his mother, and Bruce thought if Pierre knew, he wouldn't let him have the money."

"Didn't the officers know about this mine?"

"They didn't know about it when Father Tony and I left Orchard Hill. You see, from the first, Bruce never would let us tell anybody about it because he was connected with the bank, and he thought Mr. Dayton, the president, wouldn't like him to be interested in mines and such things."

"I see. So you thought Pierre could find your husband and bring him back home before the sheriff could locate him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What about your father, Mrs. Carey? He is under arrest for this bank crime, ain't he?"

Ann wrung her hands. "Oh, yes, sir. And that, you see, is another reason why Bruce must come home. Bruce will know what to do to help father. We—we didn't know what to do. I—I needed Bruce so. Don't you understand, sir? Don't you?"

"There, there, ma'am. Sure, I understand. But what are you and your old friend doing away out here in Nevada?"

"We came because I was so worried about Bruce and Pierre. There was nothing we could do at home to help father. After Pierre left, the more I thought about him and Bruce, the more I worried. I was afraid Bruce wouldn't come home just for Pierre. You see, he thinks that Pierre and I—that we— Pierre is just a boy, sir, a soda fountain boy. He is so inexperienced. He might never even find Bruce, and if he did, he and Bruce might—I haven't heard a word from Pierre since he left. He might get into all sorts of trouble and danger. So I decided to come myself, and Father Tony decided to come with me. Do you know where Pierre is, sir? Has he found Bruce? Are they all right?"

"I'll tell you all I know, ma'am. There was a man who called himself Fred Burnes here in Red Butte a while back that we're satisfied is your husband, Bruce Carey. He fills the description to a hair and this Pierre Donovan who came along later huntin' him was sure he was Bruce. According to Jimmie Harrigan this man, Burnes, or Bruce Carey, went off into the desert with a fellow known here as Colorado Bill. Colorado give out they was goin' to Painted Mountains where he says he has a claim, but they didn't. Did you ever hear of a feller named Colorado Bill?"

"No, sir."

"Well, from what Jimmie Harrigan told when he was in town we figure that Colorado and Bruce are now at Blackwater Tanks. And I reckon that Pierre Donovan is with them 'cause when Harrigan started for home he said he was takin' Pierre along as far as Drippin' Spring, and would set him on the trail for Blackwater Tanks from there. I've sent two of my deputies to the Tanks to fetch Bruce and Pierre in if they're there. I've got nothin' on Colorado. If they have backtracked from the Tanks and gone to Painted Mountain it's all the same 'cause they can't go

anywhere from Painted Mountain except to Drippin' Spring and back here. If they should try to go through to Gold Center from the Tanks I have two deputies in an automobile waitin' to pick 'em up when they strike the road from here to the Center. So you can see, I'm as sure of gettin' 'em as I would be if I already had 'em locked up—that is, of course, unless the desert gets 'em first. I've had this old desert beat me to a man that I was wantin' more than once."

Ann gave a little cry and caught Old Tony's arm.

"I'm sorry, ma'am—honest to God I am. But what can I do? My instructions from your sheriff at Orchard Hill was to get 'em."

"You mean," faltered Ann, "that you are going to arrest my husband and Pierre and send them back home as criminals?"

Before the sheriff could answer, Jimmie Harrigan and another man entered the office.

"Howdy, Jimmie?" said the sheriff. "Well, Henry, what do you know? Where's Jeff?"

"Jeff'll be along directly, Sheriff. He stopped to tell his wife that he's back. We met up with Jimmie here, as we was goin' from the Spring to the Tanks. He was on his way back. He came

in with us—rode one of our pack mules. He can tell you what's happened."

The two newcomers looked curiously at Ann and Old Tony.

"These folks are interested," said the sheriff. "Go ahead with your story, Harrigan."

"Ye mind the lad, Pierre Donovan, that was wantin' me to help him find a man be the name av Bruce Carey?"

"Yes."

"Well, I took the kid, Pierre, far as the Spring, like I said I would, an' I don't mind tellin' ye that he's one damn fine boy as was to be expected av a lad named Donovan. I sure was sorry to see him startin' out for Mother Mountain all alone that mornin' and him so scared av the desert that he was near dead, but wid guts to go on in spite av his fear. Well, somehow, all the way to my place in the Biscuit Hills I kept thinkin' av the lad, and the more I thought about him the worse I felt. I'd warned him about strayin' off into Skeleton Sink, av course, but he was sich a tenderfoot, do ye see, that I feared he might manage somehow to make trouble fer himself in spite av all I'd told him. So as soon as I'd got me outfit home I turned around and come

back to Drippin' Spring to see if all was well. Nobody had been there. So then I hit the trail fer Blackwater Tanks. I found their outfit at the Tanks all right, wid no water in the Tanks, like I expected. Pierre must have found his friend Bruce and Colorado because 'twas clear that there had been three av thim there. By all the signs, one av the men had gone on toward Gold Center; one had started back to Drippin' Spring, and one is there yet."

"Pierre?" cried Ann.

"No, ma'am, it wasn't Pierre that was left, an' it wasn't Colorado."

Old Tony took Ann in his arms and comforted her with low murmured words.

"All right, Jimmie," said the sheriff.

The Irishman continued: "There appeared to have been some sort av a fight. He was shot all right. An' there was a grave about half dug. He wasn't in it, but this was." He handed the sheriff a piece of the white quartz.

The sheriff was examining the bit of quartz when the other deputy came in.

The sheriff looked up and there was a snap in his voice as he asked: "You, Henry and Jeff, have you seen this?"

"Yes, sir," said Henry.

"Sure," replied Jeff.

"Well, it'll keep until we've finished this case —understand?" he said sharply.

The men nodded and the sheriff turned to the Irishman.

"All right, Jimmie, what next?"

"There was a location notice," said Harrigan. "The names on it was Bruce Carey, Pierre Donovan and Roy Donovan."

"Just as I thought, ma'am, when you told me about Pierre's father interesting your husband in a mine out here. Colorado Bill is Roy Donovan. Who do you figure did the killin', Jimmie?"

"It must have been Colorado—that lad, Pierre, couldn't have done a thing like that."

"Then what happened?"

"I doubt, sir, if anybody will ever answer that till the judgment day. 'Tis damned little chance the one that started for Gold Center has av ever gettin' through, as ye know as well as I. And the one that started back fer Drippin' Spring must have drifted into Skeleton Sink or I would have met him. And there's no man ever heard tell av anybody comin' out av that pit av hell alive."

"That's true enough, Jimmie," returned the sheriff, "but just the same we'll have a try." He turned to his deputies: "You boys hustle out and get together all the riders you can find. "We'll need pack mules and water kegs of course. We'll—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of two men who were half carrying, half dragging Roy Donovan.

It was evident from Donovan's condition that the man had passed through a terrible experience. His haggard face, his glaring blood-shot eyes, his trembling lips and twitching features, all told the tale of one who, from physical suffering and mental agony, was close to the limit of human endurance.

When the two deputies had deposited their prisoner on a chair one of them handed a package of money to the sheriff. "Stub and I figure this here bundle must be that Orchard Hill bank's missing twenty-five thousand."

"Hell!" ejaculated the sheriff, examining the bundle of notes. "What else, Will?"

The deputy handed him a pocket book. "There's more money in here." Then he laid a gun with its belt and holster on the counter-desk,

saying to the under-sheriff, "Here's his gun, Pete."

"Good work, boys!" said the sheriff. "Where did you pick him up?"

"Right near where the Mother Mountain trail comes into the road from here to Gold Center. He was all in, and plumb loco. He was tryin' to crawl on his hands and knees. When we'd worked over him a while and got him so he could talk a little he began ravin' and cryin' and seein' things. At first he thought I was somebody he called 'Bruce' and that Stub was a boy named 'Pierre.' Then all at once he began yellin' that he'd killed his own son—his little Pierre. But when we finally got him fixed up so he was rational, he just shut up sullen and dumb, and he ain't said a word since."

"All right, boys," said the sheriff. Deputy Will went to stand with Stub—the prisoner between them.

The sheriff then said deliberately: "I may as well tell you, Mr. Colorado Bill—Roy Donovan, that we've got you dead to rights."

As the sheriff spoke the name, Antonio Latour started. Then with a reassuring murmur to Ann he came slowly forward and stood beside the

sheriff's chair, his gazed fixed intently upon the prisoner.

"We know who you are," continued the sheriff. "We know that the man who called himself Fred Burnes was Bruce Carey who was wanted in connection with that Orchard Hill bank robbery and killing, and we know that you murdered Bruce Carey at Blackwater Tanks."

Roy Donovan raised his head and looked at the sheriff in sullen defiance. Then he saw the old actor. For a moment the man stared blankly at this one who, to him, seemed to have suddenly appeared from another world. Then, as they watched, his jaw dropped, his eyes glared, his face twitched, sullen defiance gave way to stark fear. With a cry, he sprang to his feet. The two deputies on either side caught him by the arms.

"Tony Latour!" he gasped in a hoarse whisper. "It's Tony! Harriet, Bruce, Pierre—oh, my God!" He dropped back into the chair overcome with horror.

Not a sound came from those who watched. Motionless, they waited.

Then the sheriff spoke quietly: "Where did you get this Orchard Hill bank money, Donovan?"

"I got it from Bruce—no, I got it from Pierre.

Bruce got it from the cashier of the bank. Bruce told me all about it. He didn't mean to kill the cashier—cashier had stolen the money and was making his get-away. He jumped Bruce, and Bruce killed him in self-defense—didn't know he had killed him until afterwards."

"You killed Bruce for the money?"

"No, I killed him for the water. He was going to leave me without water in the desert. I had to kill him. It was self-defense, I tell you! Pierre heard Bruce tell me about the bank affair. He was going to bring me in to you for shooting Bruce. He was going to take the money back to the bank. He wouldn't listen to reason. Pierre is a sentimental, idealistic fool, like his mother—all artist. Made me dig a grave. I struck the lost Mother Mountain lode. Even then, Pierre wouldn't listen."

"So you killed Pierre, too, did you?"

"No, no, that's a lie—I never killed him—I couldn't kill my own son, could I? I played fair with Pierre. When he wouldn't go with me, I gave him half the water. He had a better chance to get back to Dripping Spring than I had to make Gold Center—you know that, don't you, Sheriff? I never killed my own son. If he is dead

it's because the desert got him—same as it's got me." The man slumped down in his chair, supported by the two deputies.

"Take him away, boys," said the sheriff. "He'll brace up again after a little. Keep your eye on him, Pete, and get his written confession with all the details when he's able to make it."

"Right, Sheriff," answered Pete, and the two deputies took their prisoner into one of the other rooms.

To the three other men—Charlie, Jeff and Henry—the sheriff said: "Now, boys, hop to it and get that posse together. There's not much chance of our finding that boy, Pierre, in Skeleton Sink, but we've got to do what we can."

The men left the office and the sheriff turned to Ann who, sitting a little apart with Old Tony and Jimmie Harrigan, was crying quietly.

"I'm real sorry, Mrs. Carey, ma'am. It's too bad it had to happen like this—with you here."

"I would have to know it anyway, Sheriff. Please don't think I—I blame anybody. We—we're all of us to blame for such things, I guess. It's better for Bruce, this way, than—than—"

The two deputies, who had taken Donovan to the adjoining room, returned and the sheriff said

to them: "I've sent the other men to get a posse together to look for that boy, Pierre. You two had better go along and help them. I want every man in Red Butte that's able to sit on a horse. I know it ain't much use, ma'am," he added to Ann, "but we ain't goin' to let a boy like that die without a try."

The two men, Will and Stub, were half way to the entrance when a figure, terrible to see, staggered through the open door. His unshaven face was haggard and caked with sweat and dust. Between his sun-cracked and swollen lips his swollen tongue could be seen. His eyes, in their sunken caverns, under a drawn and wrinkled brow, were almost closed, and he peered about uncertainly, and made curious groping motions with his clawlike hands.

The two deputies sprang to the poor creature's side and supported him to a chair.

The sheriff ran to the water-cooler.

The newcomer peered at those about him as if he saw them only as dim shadows of people. He opened his swollen lips and tried to speak, but only a hoarse, rasping mumble came from his throat. He pointed to his mouth—attempted to make a motion with his hand as if raising a cup

to his lips—and then, before the sheriff could reach him with the water, the last of his strength failed; his eyes closed; his head fell forward; his whole body slumped from the chair to the floor.

"Great God almighty!" exclaimed Jimmie Harrigan. "It's the kid, Pierre!"

The same instant, Ann cried, "Pierre!" and ran to kneel beside the unconscious boy.

Old Tony, without a word, stood over them.

The others, wise from years of experience in the ways of the desert, worked with all their skill to bring back the life that was so nearly gone.

Several times the sheriff shook his head hopelessly.

Jimmie Harrigan muttered grim curses and prayers.

Ann murmured as a mother to her child, whispering again and again, "Pierre! Pierre!" assuring him that everything was all right; that he was safe; that she, Ann, and Father Tony were there.

"I'm afraid it ain't no use, ma'am," said the sheriff.

But even as he spoke, Pierre's breast heaved with a long sigh and he stirred as one about to

awaken from sleep. Another moment and he slowly opened his eyes.

"Pierre!" cried Ann, and there was gladness and love in her voice. "Pierre, don't you know me—Ann? And here is Father Tony—your Father Tony, Pierre."

They saw the light of recognition come into the deep sunken eyes. He looked wearily from face to face, then back to Ann, and they could see him questioning, thinking, thinking. And then they saw the great soul of Harriet Noël's son regaining its mastery over the desert-tortured body and the bewildered and tormented brain. His voice came thick and harsh through his cracked and swollen lips: "Where am I?"

It was Jimmie Harrigan who answered joyfully: "Sure and ye are back in Red Butte, me lad, safe and sound after comin' through what no other man has ever yet come through and lived to tell about it."

"Red Butte?" said Pierre. He looked at the sheriff, "Who are you?"

"I'm Sheriff Billings, son, but don't worry, my boy, it's all right—everything's all right."

He stooped to put a glass of water to the parched lips. Instantly the thirst-tortured body

asserted itself. The talonlike hands clutched the glass with a grip of desperate eagerness. An insane animal light flashed in the deep-set eyes; strange mumbling, sucking, animal sounds came from the parched throat.

"Steady, boy!" said the sheriff, "steady. Just a little at a time does it. You can have some more in a few minutes, and pretty soon all you want."

His strong hand removed the glass from that despairing grip, and passed it to Will, who put it quickly out of sight.

Once more the boy looked from face to face, and as he rested his gaze on Ann, they saw the Pierre Donovan, who lived within this flesh that was so near to death, asserting himself. They saw but did not understand that Harriet Noël's actor son was about to play still another part. They did not know that as he lay there looking into Ann's face, Pierre Donovan, the actor, was visualizing the character which for love of her he must create.

Acting this new rôle, he said in a stronger, clearer voice: "There is something I must tell you, Ann."

"Not now, dear. Wait until you are stronger."

"No, I must tell you now. I can't wait."

For a moment he was silent and they could see that he was arranging his thoughts and calling on the scant store of physical strength that was left to him.

"You remember that night we set up your dressmaking form, Ann?"

"I could never forget that, dear," cried Ann impulsively. "But—"

He interrupted her.

"I said I would get the money I needed if I had to steal it."

"I know, Pierre dear, but you must not—"

He stopped her with an imperative gesture—the gesture of the soda fountain boy actor.

Ann choked back a sob and Old Tony turned his face away.

"Well, after I left you," Pierre continued, still acting his part in his best soda fountain manner, "I was passing the bank. I saw the cashier go in. He left the door ajar. I followed him. He had a lot of money. I hit him with Martin's cane and took the money. You saw me, Father Tony, when I was running away. I didn't mean to kill the cashier. The sight of all that money made me crazy, I guess."

"Pierre, Pierre!" cried Ann. "Stop—oh, stop, dear Pierre! You must not—"

Pierre checked her by struggling to his knees. Speechless with amazement they helped him to a chair. And then, before they could stop him, as if he were acting in a play, he continued to pour out his fantastic confession, his voice gaining strength as he proceeded, as if his indomitable spirit were rallying the last of his physical powers for the climax.

"I decided that night that I would be rich—that I *must* be rich. I had learned the truth that money is everything and that art is nothing. This is the day of money—art is dead. I saw that I had been a fool to wish to be an actor. To want money; to live for money; to die for money; to go to hell for money—that is the thing. I thought that with this bank money to start with, I could make millions because that is the way millions are made. I came west under the pretense of finding Bruce. I told Bruce what I had done. He tried to make me go back to Orchard Hill and give myself up. We got lost in the desert; there was not water enough for two; Bruce died. Bruce gave his life to save me, Ann —'greater love hath no man than this—'" His

voice faltered, and acting his part, he bowed his head in grief and shame.

No one stirred. Awe-stricken, as if in the presence of something more than human, they could neither move nor cry out.

Suddenly, Pierre rose to his feet and in the manner of an actor, playing a melodramatic part on the stage, cried in a clear voice: "I, Pierre Donovan, do solemnly declare in the presence of these witnesses that I am guilty of the crime for which they have arrested Ann's father; that Ann's husband, Bruce Carey, died to save my life."

For a moment he held the pose. Then stepping backward as if about to exit from the stage, he staggered and nearly fell. The sheriff started forward. But Pierre, drawing himself erect, halted the officer with an imperious, melodramatic gesture. The next instant he moved a step backward and fell.

Ann was the first to reach him. "Pierre!" she called, "Pierre! Don't leave me, Pierre! I love you, Pierre, don't leave me!"

The sheriff knelt over the prostrate form. Slowly he rose to his feet signifying with a gesture that the actor had indeed made his exit.

EXIT

The deputies and Jimmie Harrigan stood with bowed heads.

Old Antonio Latour said reverently, "Bravo, bravo, my little Pierre!"

CURTAIN

III

AFTER THE PLAY

Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.

VANITY FAIR.

III

IT was very quiet and peaceful in the living room of the Carey home when old Antonio Latour finished reading the play which he had written for his beloved Pierre. Ann's ironing was forgotten, the flat-iron on the board was cold. Ann, seated in a low chair by the window, was crying. A vagrant puff of summer air wandered into the room and stirred a wayward strand of her brown hair. Old Tony, himself deeply moved, slowly and thoughtfully closed his precious manuscript and clasping it to his breast looked at Ann. A sad, understanding smile crept like a beautiful glow over the old actor's face.

"There, there, Ann," he said with gentle cheerfulness, "how foolish we are. It is only a play."

"It seemed to me, when you were reading it, that it was all true."

"It *is* true," returned Old Tony with a pleased smile.

"But, Father Tony, those things in your play never actually happened."

"Because the real tragedies of our lives may never be acted before an audience in a public place, are they less real, Ann?"

"No, Father Tony."

"Because a great soul sacrifices itself in secret, is that sacrifice less real because the world does not witness it?"

"No."

"Because a great love must ever remain unknown and unguessed even by those who live most intimately with the lovers, is that love less real?"

"No, no, Father Tony."

"Some things that actually happen are not true, Ann, and some things that never happen are true."

"It was exactly like Pierre," said Ann.

Old Tony chuckled. "It will be called rank melodrama, I suppose."

"Is it?"

"That all depends, my dear, upon the actors. There is nothing more melodramatic than this play which we call 'life' when it is played by melodramatic actors."

The sound of an automobile stopping in front of the house came through the open window. Ann rose and looked out.

"It is Pierre," she cried joyously. "His

friends, the Campbell boys, brought him home in their car."

The old actor and the girl housewife listened with smiling faces as Pierre shouted from the door: "Thanks for the ride, fellows. Good-by. Remember, don't do anything I wouldn't do. Look me up if you come to New York—you know, The American Academy of Dramatic Art, or somewhere on Broadway."

"Good-by, nothing!" came another voice, and another chimed in with, "We're coming back to take you to your train."

"Good boys!" shouted Pierre. "So long!" The automobile moved noisily on.

With a shout, "Hello, folks!" Pierre bounded into the living room. His arms were piled high with bundles and packages; his face beamed with joyous eager excitement. Still holding his bundles he danced over to Ann.

"How's my sweet Lady Ann?" He pretended he was about to kiss her and with a laugh at her embarrassment whirled on to Old Tony.

"Thought I'd find you here, Father Tony. How's the old boy?" He tried to slap the old actor on the back but could not because of the bundles.

"Gee!" he shouted. "I've got to rush—train leaves at five fifty-three. Been doing some last-minute shopping and telling everybody good-by. Bruce home yet? Where's Martin? Excuse me, will you, folks, I've got to finish packing." He rushed from the room and ran up the stairs three steps at a time.

Ann ran into the hall and looked up wistfully.

"Can I help you, Pierre?" and she could not hide the eager longing in her voice.

"Thanks, Ann. I'm about finished—I won't be long. You take care of Father Tony."

With a lingering look up the stairs, Ann turned slowly and came back to the old actor.

"Father Tony," she said thoughtfully.

"Yes, Ann."

"I—I understand exactly what your play, 'Exit' means. But—"

"But what, Ann?" And the old actor's heart ached for her as she answered slowly, "There are some things in life that are as inevitable, as final, and as irrevocable as death itself."

"Yes, dear, I know, I know."

She continued as if her heart were breaking:

"When Pierre makes his exit from our Orchard

Hill world this afternoon, his Orchard Hill life is ended. He dies. To us who must go on living here he will be dead. He goes to live in another world, as truly as his mother went into another world when she died—when she made her exit. I cannot go with Pierre into his new life. I cannot be with him there. Pierre can never come back.

"The world into which he is going will receive him, honor him, love him, and it will hold him from us forever. Some day, perhaps, a famous actor named Pierre Donovan may pay a visit to Orchard Hill, but the Pierre I know and love—the soda fountain boy—my own Pierre—can never come back. My—my Pierre's exit from Orchard Hill, too, is death."

The old actor took her in his arms.

"Yes, dear, I know, I know. But the play must go on—always the play must go on. Our Pierre must act his part. And you, too, Ann, may stand in the wings. Yes, yes, dear, we shall stand in the wings."

Pierre came dashing down the stairs and into the room carrying a suitcase. Without a word he deposited the suitcase on the floor, whirled about and dashed madly upstairs again.

Martin Bevis came hurrying in, gold-headed cane in hand.

"Hello, Tony!" he cried cheerfully. "Glad to see you—thought I'd find you here. Where's Pierre?" he demanded. "I came home just for a few minutes to see the boy off. I'll have to go back down to the bank again—books lack thirty-nine cents of balancing. Thirty-nine cents!"

He drew out his watch and his Masonic charm fell to the floor. "There goes my Masonic charm again!" he exclaimed.

Ann recovered the charm and giving it to him said, "You'd better leave it at home, Pa, until you get it fixed, or you'll lose it for good."

"The spring on this snap is weak," said Martin, fixing it and restoring the charm to its place on his watch chain. "I'll have it fixed to-morrow sure—wouldn't lose that sacred emblem for a fortune."

Bruce entered with a cordial, "Glad to see you, Father Tony. You beat me home, Pa." He kissed Ann and said, "Where's Pierre? Isn't he ready yet?" He went into the hall and called upstairs: "Hey, kiddo, you'd better get a move on! That five fifty-three won't wait, you know, even for a distinguished actor."

Pierre bounded down the stairs and into the room, carrying a bag which he deposited beside the suitcase.

Striking an attitude in his best soda fountain actor manner, he declaimed: "Friends, the hour of my departure has arrived; the lugger is in the cove; the tide is on the turn; the wind rises. Let there be no moaning at the bar when I put out to sea!"

They all laughed, but it was nervous, excited laughter which revealed the emotion they were trying to conceal.

Bruce slapped Pierre on the shoulder. "Some actor, kiddo! But I still think you're a darned fool for not letting me invest your money in that Nevada gold mine."

An automobile stopped in front of the house and a horn sounded.

Pierre put out his hand to Bruce. "Bye, bye, Bruce! Be good to yourself and to Lady Ann."

Bruce caught up the suitcase. "I'm going to the depot with you," he said and went out.

Pierre turned to Martin: "Good-by, Pa Martin —take care of the trick Masonic charm and the little old balances."

"I'm going with you as far as the bank," Mar-

tin answered, and taking the bag he followed Bruce.

Old Tony went with Martin, but in the hall he paused and looked back, waited an instant for Pierre to follow, then moved on.

Pierre turned to Ann: "Well, Lady Ann?" He kissed her. Then suddenly, to cover his real emotion which was almost beyond his control, he burlesqued the scene with extravagant phrases and ridiculous acting which did not hide, but rather revealed his love. Moving toward the archway into the hall, he cried, with appropriate melodramatic gesture, "And now, sweet Lady Ann, fare thee well. My destiny calls. I must obey. Alone into the cold and cruel world I go—alone, alone! May angels guard thee, my sweet Lady Ann, and strew thy path with roses. The august author of our fate hath written—exit Pierre, the soda jerk!" With a sweeping bow he backed from her sight.

Ann, with outstretched arms, cried, "Pierre! Pierre! Don't leave me, Pierre! I love you, Pierre, don't leave me!"

As one impelled by some power stronger than his own will, Pierre stepped back into the room and held out his arms to her.

Ann ran to him and, throwing her arms about his neck, clung to him as if she could not let him go.

Old Tony appeared in the archway but they were oblivious to his presence.

Regarding them with fond understanding, the old actor stood, glancing watchfully back toward the door to the street as if he had purposely placed himself on guard so that they might have this moment of love uninterrupted.

Bruce's voice outside called: "Come on, Pierre!"

An automobile horn sounded.

Old Tony disappeared down the hall.

Pierre released himself from Ann's embrace, and without looking back ran from the room.

Running to the window, Ann, on her knees, watched the automobile out of sight. When the sound had died away she turned slowly from the window, wiping her eyes and sobbing. Going to the ironing board she put it away in the kitchen and began doing things about the stove as if to prepare supper.

(1)

THE END

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